

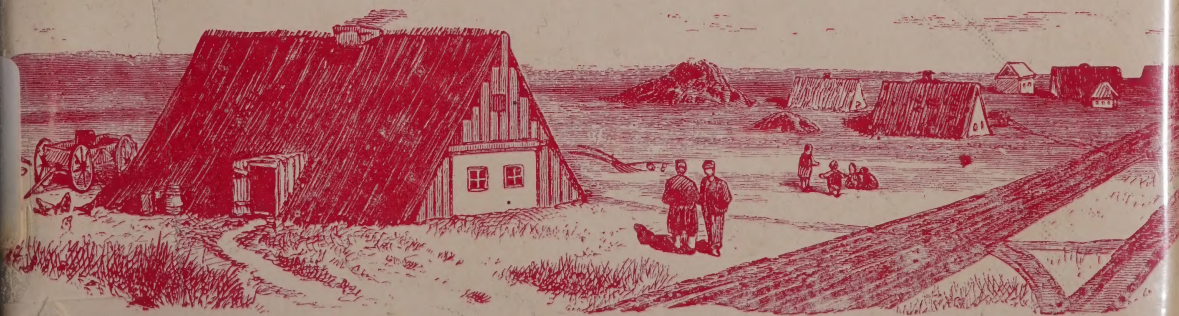


Switzerland	1520
Friesland	1530
Germany	1550
Pennsylvania	1683
South Russia	1788
America	1874
Mexico	1922
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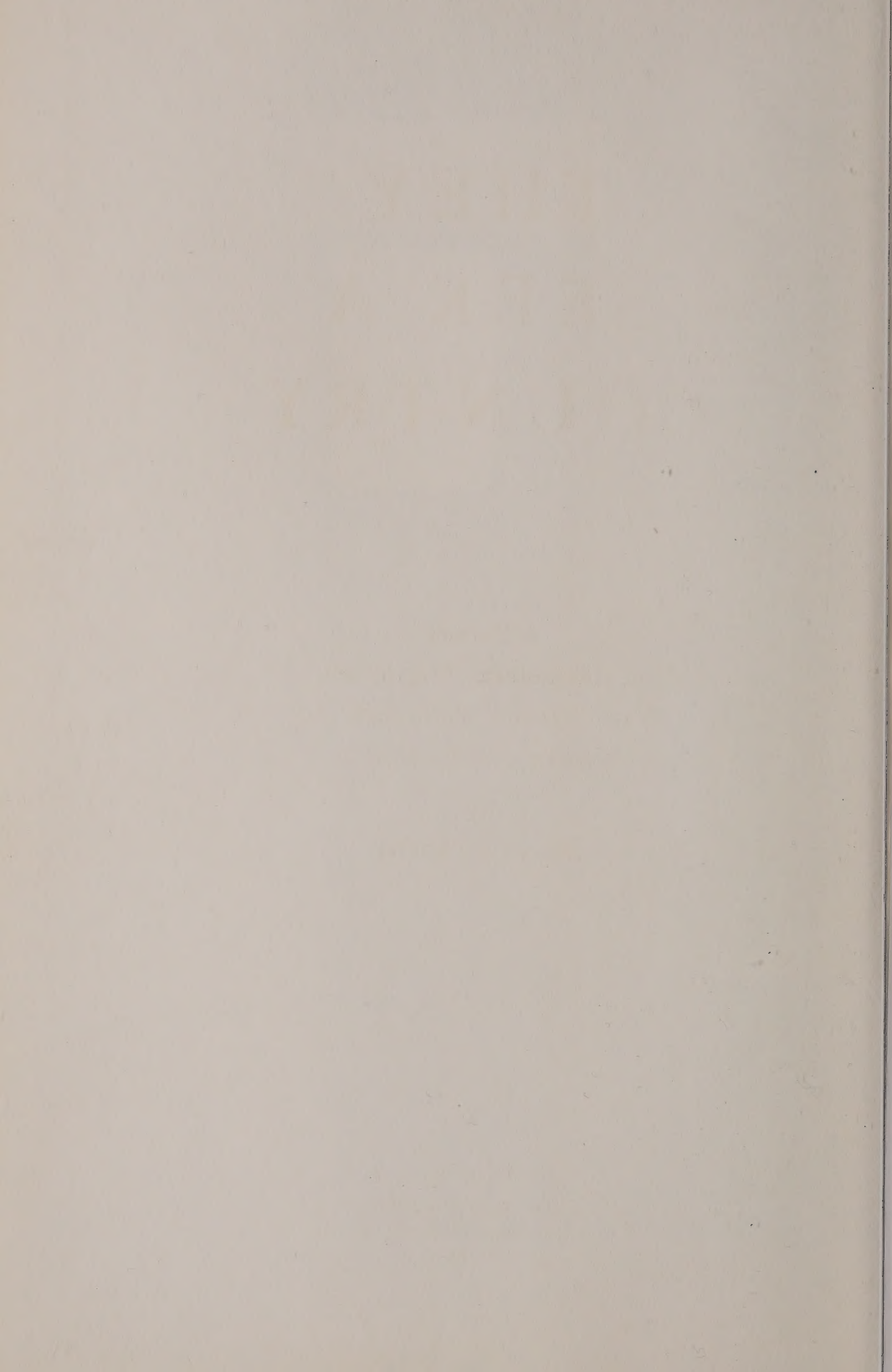
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# THEY SEEK A COUNTRY

A Survey  
of Mennonite Migrations  
With Special Reference To  
Kansas and Gnadenau

by  
David V. Wiebe

Printed by  
The Mennonite Brethren Publishing House  
Hillsboro, Kansas  
1959



**A Threshing Stone**

Printed in U. S. A.



# ERRATA

- Page 19 - Prussia instead of Russia ( last paragraph - first line )
- Page 27 - Johann Cornies 1789 - 1848
- Page 50 - 100 Years old November 17, 1959.
- Page 53 - In page heading delete 2.
- Page 173 - Crimean Brethren ( First line )
- Page 129 - Educational products ( second last line )
- Page 191 - Asterisk omitted - Mennonite Bodies caption.





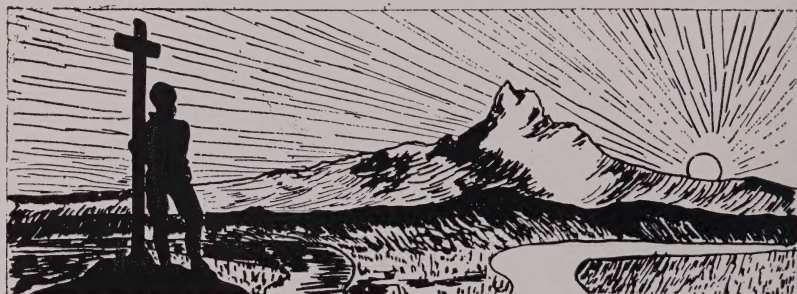


DEDICATED  
To The Pioneers  
Who Migrated  
To The American Prairies



Immigrant Hut 1874

*For They That Say Such Things  
Declare Plainly  
That  
They Seek A Country\**



\* Hebrews 11:14.



## PREFACE

THIS IMMIGRATION REVIEW attempts to report the Mennonite migrations to America and to review their social and spiritual contributions. It is motivated by the conviction that in spite of all the errors and shortcomings of these people their story is a powerful testimony to a faith that survived wanderings and pioneer hardships.

The immigrants were of Dutch and Swiss descent and they came from South Russia, Prussia, the Crimean Peninsula, and Poland.\* Kansas is chosen for special reference because it received the largest number of settlers. The **Gnadenau** village was unique because it was laid out according to the Russian village pattern. However, much that applies to Kansas and to Gnadenau would also apply to settlements in other states, provinces, and villages. Each had to make its adjustments and had its struggles, failures and victories.

This report was begun in 1926 while working on an historical thesis at the University of Kansas. The gathered material was carried from Kansas to the West Coast and to British Columbia and back to California and back to Kansas with an abiding idea that if time and circumstances would permit, the writer would compile a discussion of the Great Migrations. He believed that a review of the epic events and glorious traditions would be of interest to many.

In 1952 the writer received a call to serve the first church established by the 1874 immigrants and his opportunity to gather more material was facilitated and his interest in the Great Migrations revived. His visit to the former homes of the immigrants: The Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and France filled him with wonderment and appreciation for the escape of many thousands from the terrors of dictatorships, wars, and annihilation. The wanderings of these **home seekers** have not been in vain.

Finally the writer was enabled to compile this migration review. The aim was to write a report that would read easily and be an asset to every Mennonite home as well as to non-Mennonite homes. The writer realizes that his attempt falls far short of doing justice to the thrilling migration epics. Nevertheless, he hopes that this study may help to preserve some data and may assist to evaluate the social, economic, and spiritual contributions that the settlers made. The heritages of the "Country Seekers" live on in the minds and hearts of many people.

D. V. W.

Hillsboro, Kansas  
October, 1959

---

\* Writers quoted in this discussion often speak of these immigrants as Russians but that connotation applies only to their temporary stay in Russia and not to their ethnic descent.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND SOURCES

THIS LITERARY VENTURE makes no claim to originality. Rather it has been an attempt to gather the events of this historical drama from many sources. Our aim has been to present facts — not fiction. The events and quotations have been taken from letters, diaries, interviews, newspapers, periodicals, theses, books, and tombstones. Where translations were necessary and abbreviations advisable, we have tried to convey the uncolored meaning and have screened conflicting reports so as to present things as they were. In fiction these immigrants have been reported as of the Slavic race — which they were not. They have been pictured as mercenary, unscrupulous, and evil on the one hand or as perfectionists and angelic on the other. Neither is correct. They were human but in bequeathing a rich heritage to their posterity, they have not altogether failed.

Among many other references the following have been especially helpful: Menno Simons, *Elements of the True Christian Faith*, 1556; P. M. Friesen, *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*, 1789-1910; D. W. Wilder, *The Annals of Kansas*, 1875; N. L. Prentiss, *Kansas Miscellanies*, 1875-1882; D. K. Cassel, *History of the Mennonites*, 1888; H. P. Krehbiel, *History of the Mennonites General Conference*, 1898; C. H. Wedel, *Mennonite Histories*, 1900-1910; G. D. Bradley, *The Story of the Santa Fe*, 1920; J. F. Harms, *Mennonitische Brüdergemeinde*, 1924; P. A. Wiebe, *Biography of Jacob A. Wiebe*, 1924; H. P. Peters, *Education Among the Mennonites*, 1925; C. Henry Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites*, 1927; Bliss Isely, *Early Days in Kansas*, 1927; Everett Dick, *Sod House Frontier*, 1937; James C. Malin, *Winter Wheat*, 1944; Alberta Pantle, *Settlement of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren*, 1945; C. Krahn, *From the Steppes to the Prairies*, 1949; Wm. Bracke, *Wheat Country*, 1950; J. H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church*, 1950; Smith and Krahn, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites*, 1950; G. E. Reimer-G. R. Gaeddert, *Exiled by the Czar*, 1956; G. E. Reaman, *The Trail of the Black Walnut*, 1957.

Mennonite Encyclopedia, State Board of Agriculture Reports, Kansas Histories, State Historical Library, Mennonite Life, A Guide to Hillsboro, Santa Fe Bulletins, Kansas Magazine, Conference Reports, Gnadenau Church Files, Anniversary Booklets, Ship Records. Also writings by: Christian Krehbiel, Jacob A. Wiebe, John F. Funk, W. J. Groat, Peter A. Wiebe, E. W. Hoch, Ferdinand Funk, J. Z. Wiebe, A. E. Janzen, E. G. Kaufman, H. S. Bender, J. G. Barkman, J. John Friesen, M. S. Harder, H. H. Janzen, C. C. Janzen, J. W. Fretz, E. Yoder, Theo. C. Wedel, Wm. R. Nelson.

We acknowledge with gratitude the use of material and cuts from various sources and we express our sincere thanks to all who have helped in the preparation of this report.

D. V. W.

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## PART ONE

### Home Seekers

#### PROLOGUE

#### CALLED OUT

*Unto a land that I will show thee—The Eternal*

This is a story of wanderings and pioneer days; of partings and hardships; of hopes and dreams; of faith ventures and new horizons. It is the story of people who for more than four hundred years retained their identity in spite of persecutions and migrations, and it is a profile of thousands of courageous settlers who planted their villages on marshes and prairies.

Nothing in life is static. Time moves relentlessly on and days come and go and although one is hardly aware of it, momentous changes take place continuously. Each in his circle shares the joys, pains, and sorrows that come in the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness; but sooner or later one generation after another passes on. Changes are continuously thrust upon people and new adjustments have to be made. As we review the panorama of the Mennonite immigrants; their ancestry, their wanderings, their pioneer days, and their contributions, we become aware of the manifold and revolutionary adjustments they were called on to make.

It can safely be said that more changes have taken place during the last decades than for centuries before. This has been an age of startling discoveries and world-rocking inventions. In short order the candle has been displaced by the kerosene lamp. The kerosene lamp by the gas lamp, and the gas lamp by electricity. Amazing changes have come to the farm as well as to the city.



Courtesy Mennonite Life

The threshing stone has been displaced by the self-propelled combine. The horse has practically vanished and instead of the

hand plow, sulky plow, or gang plow, every farmer has one or several tractors; and instead of the ox cart or buggy, one, two, or three hundred horsepower automobiles. The telephone, the phonograph, the radio, and television have come to stay. Aviation has made all corners of the world easily and speedily accessible to each other, and missiles and man-made satellites ply the regions of outer space.



Courtesy Mennonite Life

Mennonite Central Committee Representatives ready to leave Asuncion for the Chaco in Paraguay, South America

Today "Good Will" tidings can be carried out quickly, but today the world also holds within its hands lethal weapons so powerful that we shudder to think of the consequences. When we consider the modern inventions and the amazing conveniences we have, the future looks very bright; when we look at the ghastly demonical weapons of destruction at the command of men, and the seething unrest in the world, we are filled with alarm. Yet there is no need to despair. There are values that are indestructible and these are the things that make life serene and fruitful.

More than three thousand years ago a man was called out from his father's house, his kindred, and his country—"not knowing whither he went." In the providence of God, for him and his descendants, his sojournings, his daring, his obedience, and above all his faith were tremendously important. With this faith others too, have launched out on untrod paths. Old worlds have been left behind and new worlds have been discovered. Prized possessions have been sacrificed, dear homes abandoned, and patiently new homes have been established; but the things that have counted have come by faith.

We believe it can be stated that the Mennonite immigrants were men of faith. They too, in the quest for eternal values, left behind the things that they believed meant compromise and defeat. For "conscience sake" a home-loving people became a wandering people. Their decisions were not easy and their paths often stony but in it all there is a pattern of Divine guidance.

Eighty-five years ago, many thousand miles from here, a group of immigrants said their last farewells to their beloved homes. It was in South Russia in the early morning of a bright May day. Their decisions had been made—their lot cast. Their hard-earned belongings had been disposed of at tremendous sacrifices and their trunks and chests had been carefully packed with their most treasured possessions.



An Immigrant's Russian Cedar Chest

In the chest were garments of coarse wool, feather pillows and a feather quilt, sheets, linens, knitted scarfs, hand embroidered satin shawls, a large woolen shawl, a few china and glass heirlooms, a few school day mementos, a pen-written song book, a Russian pendulum clock, some hand-picked seed, a few gold pieces in a secret drawer, and always the Family Bible with the Family Records.

Now the dreaded hour had arrived. All the children and grandchildren of a certain mother Anna\* were to leave for that rather unknown, far away country—America. The mother alone would stay behind—never to see her loved ones again. Only **faith** could make such a farewell possible and endurable. It will always be recorded to this mother's credit that it was she who urged all her children to leave. "Children go—Go with God." When the last word had been spoken and the last farewell caress given, as long as the departed could see through tear filled eyes, Anna was

---

\* The mother of Jacob A. Wiebe, the founder of the Gnadenau village. Also the grandmother of Cornelius H. Wedel, first president of Bethel College. Also the grandmother of the writer of this immigration report.



standing in front of the long cherished home, bravely waving her kerchief. Such gallant examples of unselfishness and heroism should help later generations to move forward fearlessly.



Anna's Home, Margenau Village, South Russia

It is not assumed that the actions and wanderings of these "country seekers" have always been faultless. "To err is human" and bitter mistakes have been made. Progress has at times been slow, costly, and painful. Along the way there have appeared petty bickerings, ill-advised choices, dissensions, glaring inconsistencies and other weaknesses. Insincerity, rashness, or incomplete obedience have always been fraught with disaster.

In spite of mistakes and shortcomings, the immigrants and their forebears, by and large, have been known for their thrift, industriousness, and their honesty. They were simple God-fearing people who loved the soil, their family, their home, and their church—yet they were led from country to country. Wherever they went they planted and reaped, and built homes, schools, and churches. Thriving wheat fields, mulberry hedges, apricot and olive trees, and hard work have characterized these "Home Seekers" but more than anything else—their simple faith in an **Eternal God.**

As Abraham of old, these people too, were **called out.** Their faith wanderings have taken them to many countries; through persecutions and sorrows, through waters and fires, through poverty and prosperity, and through good days and evil days. But as in Abram's time, so has it been throughout the centuries; the people who surrender their homes and comforts in quest of eternal values **"declare plainly that THEY SEEK A COUNTRY."**

## CHAPTER I

### Conscience Nomads

*Consider the days of many generations—Song of Moses*

Many generations have come and gone of whom nothing is known. They have lived and died and returned to dust. Some have died on land, some at sea, some on the battle field, and some as martyrs at the stake. To God alone they are known. Yet, in the providence of God, through them, blessings have come to their descendants.

We find that the remote ancestry of the Mennonite immigrants is hid in obscurity. In the early centuries after Christ, Teutonic invaders came from the unknown North and took over Europe. We know that the forebears of the immigrants were of **Teutonic** stock and that most of them were of Dutch or Swiss descent whose earliest known home was in Holland, Friesland, or Switzerland. The language of those who originally came from the Netherlands was Dutch or Low-German, similar to the official Netherlands Dutch today.

The forebears of most of the immigrants found in Holland a country of marshes and lakes, but by a system of dikes and canals it was possible to transform much of the lowlands into productive farm land. In many parts the surface of the land is below sea level and windmills are used for pumping water from some distance below the surface and for grinding grain and making flour.



A Farm Home in Holland



Farming became the accepted and chief way of life for the ancestors of the immigrants. They became experts in reclaiming swampland. Their skill to survive on poor land later proved to be their greatest asset. Although there have been wealthy Mennonites in Holland, most of them lived on small farms and practiced dairying. They would have been happy to quietly continue their agricultural pursuits, had not their religious convictions brought them into bitter conflict with the rulers and the State Church.

Before the time of the Reformation, evangelical Christianity was in favor in Holland. Waldensian congregations, who held that the Church had deviated from the truth, had continued to exist in Holland. Pious men arose in Switzerland, Germany, and Holland who preached and wrote books and who succeeded in gaining much influence. These groups in the sixteenth century were called **Anabaptists\*** and were immediately persecuted. This led to their dispersal to other countries. The Anabaptists were the religious forebears of the Mennonite immigrants.

### Life in Holland



At the Pump

Historically the events on record indicate that the Mennonite people have been connected with three mass migrations: To Prussia, to Russia, and to America. Their culture was influenced by each country in which they lived. In Switzerland, Germany, and Holland they adopted the Anabaptist faith, and farming became their chief occupation. When they migrated to Prussia, Russia, and to America they carried their faith, the Dutch or a Swiss

---

\* Anabaptism means re-baptism or adult baptism.



dialect language, and the Dutch windmill with them to each country. In Prussia they reluctantly accepted the High-German for use in school and in churches. In Russia, on the steppes of the Ukraine, they developed upland farming methods and became excellent farmers. However, in spite of their sojournings in different countries, they remained a distinct and compact group, held together by ties of race, religion, customs, and language, intent to perpetuate their way of life. Each pilgrimage was made under duress, in quest of religious freedom.

### Reminiscent of Holland



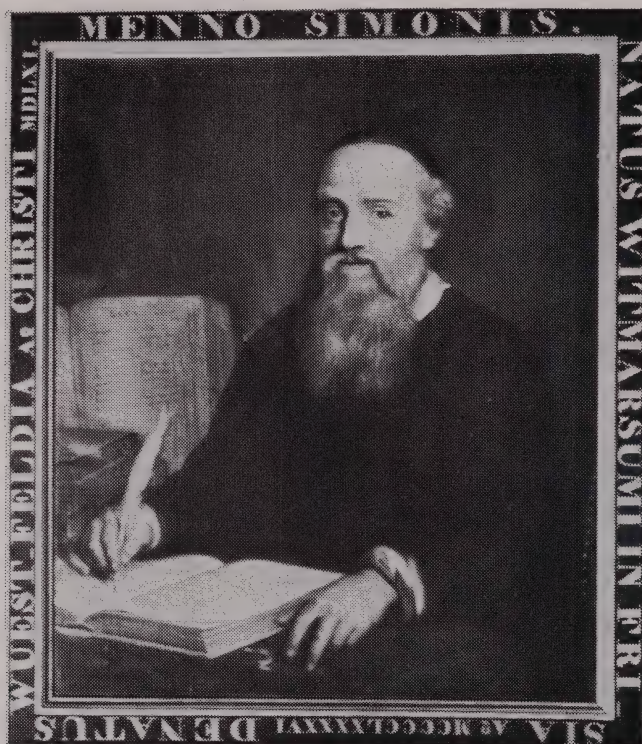
### FROM HOLLAND TO PRUSSIA

The persecutions of the Anabaptists was the reason for the migration of Mennonites from Holland to Prussia. As a church body the Anabaptists had their beginning in Switzerland and Germany. They believed that religion is a matter of individual conscience and based their faith and practice on the New Testament church. Conrad Grebel, the son of a rich Zurich alderman, was one of their leaders. With Grebel worked Georg Blaurock and Felix Manz, also of prominent families and well educated. Blaurock baptized one thousand persons within four years. Persecutions of the most violent sort soon broke out. Zwingli, called the Anabaptists, "devils disguised as angels of light." On January 5, 1527, Felix Manz, the first Anabaptist martyr, was drowned in the Limmat River at Zurich. Yet, in spite of persecutions the movement spread to Holland and Friesland and in 1537, Menno Simons, a former priest, well educated and versed in Latin and Greek,\* became an outstanding leader among the Anabaptists. He joined that movement at a critical time, defended its doctrines, and

---

\* The theologian, Dr. Camp, called Menno Simons, "A scholar of the first rank."

comforted those that were persecuted. Consequently, Anabaptists in Holland and other countries were soon called **Mennists** and later **Mennonites**.



Menno Simons was born of peasant origin at Witmarsum in northeastern Holland. His date of birth and death are somewhat shrouded in mystery. Many sources give 1492 and 1559; others 1496 and 1561. Menno Simons was brought to reflect on matters of religion and baptism by the execution of an Anabaptist. He began to study the Bible intensively and after his conversion he traveled widely and everywhere he came he preached effectively. He was also a voluminous writer on doctrinal matters. In 1539 he published: **Elements of the True Christian Faith**, a work crystalizing the belief of the Anabaptists. After preaching among Anabaptists for eighteen years, Menno Simons wrote an autobiography in which he describes his conversion. He says:

I write these truths in Christ and lie not. When I was twenty-four years old I became a priest in my father's village, Pingjum. Two others helped me—one, my pastor, a very learned man. I, in all my days had not touched the Scriptures. I was tormented with doubts.

The two young men and I spent our time playing cards, drinking, and with other frivolities, as are the habits of such. We could not speak of the Scripture without mockery.

Finally I decided to read the New Testament diligently. Day by day I advanced in the knowledge of the Scriptures. It came about that a God-

fearing hero, Sicke Snyder,\* was beheaded because he was baptized. It sounded very strange to me.

Later the Muenster sect broke in by whom many conscientious hearts were misled. (A fanatical sect practicing adult baptism but indulging in force, polygamy, killing, and anarchy.)

Now I began to preach the true Word of God; openly to denounce all sin and false worship. Also I warned against the Muenster abomination: king, polygamy, earthly kingdom, and the sword. This I did until after nine months, the Lord empowered me to forsake honor, reputation, my anti-Christian abominations, and my secure life.

Behold, thus the God of mercy turned me from the way of death unto the path of life and into the fellowship with the saints. To Him be praise forever. Amen. Menno Simons.

The Anabaptists, whom Menno Simons joined by baptism in 1536, preached regeneration, refused the oath and participation in warfare, rejected infant baptism, and held to the separation of church and state. Many were persecuted and tortured in the most gruesome manner, and beginning with the year 1527, many Anabaptists died for their faith.\*\*

Before he was executed on January 4, 1528, Leonard Schiemer had written:

We wander in the forest dark  
With dogs upon our track  
And like the captive silent lamb,  
Men, bring us prisoners, back.  
They point to us amid the throng  
And with their taunts offend,  
And long to let the sharpened ax  
On heretics descend.

—Anabaptist Hymnal, *Der Ausbund*, No. 31.

As a result of such severe persecutions in Switzerland and Holland thousands fled to other countries. Many found a place of refuge in Prussia where the large estate holders were desirous of industrious farmers who would drain their swampy lowlands. They promised the Mennonites religious freedom and warmly welcomed them on account of their farming abilities. Here, as in Holland, they transformed large areas of marshy wastes into rich farm land. They established churches but tenaciously clung to the Dutch language. When a Mennonite bishop first preached a sermon in High-German the whole church was upset. The change of language finally took place during the years 1780 to 1785.

At first the Mennonites were treated with tolerance in Russia. They built beautiful farms, planted well-kept orchards, laid out roads and water canals, and their Holland windmills added to the beauty of the scenery. As time went on strong militaristic trends developed in Prussia and when Frederick William ascended the Prussian throne in 1786, their refusal to do military service, brought them into sharp conflict with the government.

---

\* One source has Sicke Freerks; another Freerks Snijder.

\*\* The tragic record of Anabaptist persecutions is found in "*The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*" by Thielman J. van Braght first published in 1660.



Economic problems also played an important role in the animosity which developed towards the Mennonites.\* They had come to Prussia in the sixteenth century and had prospered greatly. A census in 1774 revealed that Mennonites owned 80,000 acres of rich farm land. The native Prussians now became jealous of the thrifty, prosperous Dutch, who persisted in retaining their Low-German along with the required High-German. Both the State and the Church determined to stop the further expansion of these people. Towards the close of the eighteenth century strict military and property laws were enacted. Military exemptions were withdrawn and heavy taxes imposed. Mennonites were forbidden to purchase land except from other Mennonites and they were not to propagate their faith aside from their own ranks. The Kaiser also decreed that children born out of mixed marriages could not be taken into the Mennonite church. Furthermore, the government collected fees for the State Church along with other taxes from the Mennonites.

As a consequence of these restrictions and the growing intolerance towards them Mennonites found themselves compelled to look for a new home. At this time, as a result of a war with Turkey, Russia had acquired a large territory north of the Black Sea and was anxious for frugal farmers to develop this region.

In a strange way, Russia had, many years ago, come to know the Mennonites. The wise reformer, Peter the Great, a predecessor of Cathrine II, at one time had gone to Holland to learn the trade of shipbuilding. While there he lived in the city of Zaardam and enjoyed the hospitality of a Mennonite home. The Czar is reported to have stated later that there he learned to appreciate those people. It is known that Peter the Great took with him from Holland an esteemed physician to be his personal doctor. This man was of the Mennonite faith. Possibly the great ruler felt more secure with a doctor not given to political affairs. Cathrine the Great, herself formerly a German princess, had in Prussia become aware of their agricultural abilities and she knew that they had a reputation as efficient and industrious farmers. These contacts and circumstances led to extending extraordinarily generous privileges to the Mennonites to entice them to come to Russia.

During Cathrine's reign, Baron von Trappe, was Russian minister at the Free city of Danzig and the shrewd Russian Empress had instructed this noted official to invite the Mennonites, openly or clandestinely, to come to southern Russia. Emigration activities were often carried on surreptitiously. When the Prussian officials became aware of the activities they forbade emigrant meetings in the churches, but leaflets extolling the merits of Russia were handed to the people outside of the churches after the services. Soon thousands set out on their difficult trek.

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\* G. Elmore Reaman states: "The persecutions of the Mennonites was based on economic and political grounds as well as religious. . . . Their refusal to fight was often used to deprive them of their farms. Thus greed as much as religion was responsible for much of the persecution they experienced."

## FROM PRUSSIA TO RUSSIA

The migrations began when Empress Cathrine II, in 1786, extended a cordial invitation to the Mennonites in Prussia to come and settle on the fertile regions of South Russia. Privileges were offered as they had never enjoyed before. Each settler was to receive about 180 acres of land free. Besides they were promised free transportation to Russia, a loan of 500 rubles, the support of each family until the first harvest, and aid for the building of a home. Complete religious freedom and exemption from military



Courtesy Mennonite Life

Almost two thousand families migrated to Russia

service were also guaranteed. A deputation, consisting of Johann Hoepfner and Jacob Bartsch, went to Russia at Russian expense to investigate settlement possibilities. The two traveled accompanied by Baron von Trappe and were royally received in Russia. In Crimea they traveled in the convoy of her Majesty, Empress Cathrine II, who was inspecting her newly-acquired domain. The deputies spent almost a year in Russia and decided to reserve a rich plain along the **Dnieper**, not far from where it flows into the Black Sea. Before returning home they went to St. Petersburg where they were presented to the Crown Prince, Paul I, son of the Empress. The deputies kissed his hand whereupon the Prince kissed them on the cheek. They returned in 1787 with reports that sounded like fairy tales to the hard-pressed Mennonites in

Prussia. They also reported a few unhappy experiences of their journey—Bartsch at one time had frozen his toes and Hoeppner had broken a leg. These incidents could have warned the eager emigrants, but they were soon forgotten.

As a result of several decades of oppression the Mennonites had become poor and had declined culturally and religiously. The once highly praised Mennonite church had deteriorated shockingly and many Mennonites were on the verge of despair. During the century 1700 to 1800, the Mennonites in Prussia decreased from 140,000 to 40,000, a loss of an average of 1,000 members per



### Empress Cathrine II

1729—1796

She instigated the Mennonite mass immigrations to South Russia.

year.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, when the door to southern Russia opened, thousands gathered their meager belongings and with wife and child, on foot or by horse cart, with little money and little planning, left for Russia. There they expected the soil to be fertile, there would be no dikes to build, no rivers to dam, and no land to be cleared of forests. They would receive their land free and they expected the Russian government to supply dwelling places and other settler needs. However, unforeseen circumstances developed and the first emigrant groups met with difficulties near tragic. Nevertheless, one contingent after another set out on the hazardous journey to Russia.

Besides single families and small groups, large contingents migrated. The first group, consisting of 228 families, left Prussia in 1788, soon after the deputies had returned. In 1797 another contingent of 118 families left. (The writer's great-grandparents, a Dietrich Wiebe family, were in this group). In 1804 the largest contingent, consisting of 342 families left. In 1808 there were



99 families and in 1820 another 215 families emigrated. In 1821 the larger part of the Przechowka church (later Alexanderwohl), about thirty families, left Prussia led by Elder Peter Wedel, and settled in the Molotschna colony. In 1825 another large contingent migrated\* and in 1834, about forty families migrated, led by Elder Wilhelm Lange. This group came from Brandenburg, Prussia, and established a new village and called it **Gnadenfeld**, (Grace field), because the permission to settle at such a late date was a special grant and favor from Czar Nicolas I. In 1836 the **Waldheim** congregation emigrated from Poland to Russia.

In spite of the good reports by the deputies and the generous promises of the Russian government the first contingents met with almost insurmountable difficulties. At first only those who owned no land were permitted to leave Prussia and consequently the first groups were poverty stricken, poor managers, and socially and spiritually inadequate for the task. They endured terrific hardships on the journey, making their exodus on foot, by cart, and river barge. P. M. Friesen states that "there was not a single minister in the first contingent of two hundred and twenty-eight families that came to Russia." They fled from Prussia before the diplomatic arrangements had been completed, unorganized, and without educational and spiritual leadership and without a physician. They wrestled with contagious diseases and even with starvation on the long trek and one report, a folk rime in Low-German is by no means flattering.

Geprachet, gegeft un geborgt,  
 Genoamme un dan vada vaukofft;  
 So sen Foadiki, un Moutiki, entlich,  
 Fon Dietschlaund noam wille Russland geflocht.

Begged, given, borrowed, and taken,  
 Destitute, sick, hungry, and forsaken;  
 Thus father and mother fled from Prussia,  
 To the wild steppes of South Russia.

Free translation—

The first contingent left in 1788 but it was forced to encamp for the winter along the way. Many did not survive the hardships and were buried before they reached their destination. Those that arrived in spring were doomed to another crushing disappointment. Cathrine II had wrested from Turkey the Crimea and a large portion of southern Russia, but since the Turkish War was still raging near the region the deputies had reserved, they were forced to go to much less fertile land farther up the river. They reluctantly chose a site near a small tributary of the **Dnieper**, called **Chortitza**. The settlement became known as the **Chortitza** or **Old**

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\* The writer's great-grandparents, a Franz Wiens family, were in the 1825 group. They came from Marienburg, Prussia, and had formerly been well-to-do dairy farmers. During the Napoleonic Wars, French soldiers had plundered them of all possessions—until the last calf and chicken was consumed. They trekked to Russia with nine children, destitute, traveling on foot with their few belongings on a two wheeled cart, drawn by a small horse.

**Colony** and a second settlement along the **Molotschna** river as the **Molotschna Colony**.

The immigrants were bitterly disappointed. The government was slow in extending the aid so readily promised and the settlers were constantly beset by thieving Russians. Some had sent their few belongings in boxes and chests and when they finally arrived it was found that they had been opened, emptied of their contents,



**Hoeppner Memorial on the Chortitza Island**

and again filled with worthless trash. Since they knew nothing of farming on open steppes, their plight increased. Many at first refused to make this barren region their home but others erected crude shanties while the deputies, Hoeppner and Bartsch, set out to erect substantial dwellings. This angered the immigrants even more and soon Hoeppner and Bartsch were vehemently denounced as "soul sellers." The group had elected ministers but these could do little to pacify the incensed immigrants. Twelve settlers lent themselves to testify, under oath, against the deputies, although completely against Mennonite principles. Both deputies were ex-

communicated and Hoepfner was imprisoned for a year. Bartsch pled forgiveness and was reinstated into the church. Hoepfner's property was appropriated and sold at public auction. Before his death Hoepfner requested to be buried on his own estate, rather than in the cemetery with those who had caused him so much trouble. He was buried on the Chortitza Island as requested, but at the Chortitza Centennial Anniversary in 1889, the grandchildren of those who drove Hoepfner and Bartsch into prison, erected imposing monuments in their honor.

For a long time there was much unrest and poverty in the Chortitza colony. One of the group reported: "The Elder Behrend Penner felt very sad to officiate at the Lord's Supper with "Bastel" shoes, and four sympathetic brethren contributed for a pair of boots which the deputy Bartsch made for him. At the holy sacrament some broke out in loud weeping when they thought of their former homes and fine Sunday clothes."

Cathrine II, died in 1796 and her son Paul I, became Czar of Russia. On June 29, 1798, the Mennonites sent the two elders, Epp and Willms, to Petersburg, to secure an official paper in regard to their status in Russia. They waited anxiously more than two years in the Capitol. On October 28, 1800, they returned and brought with them a beautiful parchment, printed in gold letters and with the monarchical seal. This historic document was known as the Privilegium. The document was carefully preserved by the Mennonites until the 1917 Revolution but what has become of it later is not known.

## THROUGH GOD'S HELPING GRACE

### PAUL THE FIRST

#### Emperor and Self Ruler of All Russians

- I. We assure the Mennonites and their descendants Freedom of Religion.
- II. Each family is to receive free 65 desjatinen land.\*
- III. Vocational freedom is assured to them.
- IV. They shall have the right to brew beer, vinegar, and brandy.
- V. No outsider can have a saloon or brewery on their land.
- VI. Neither they nor their descendants shall be drafted for military service unless they volunteer.
- VII. They shall not be called on to quarter the "Military," but they shall build their own roads and bridges.
- VIII. They shall have their own property and inheritance laws.
- IX. The Moloschna colony shall be exempt from paying taxes for ten years and the Chortitza colony for fifteen years.
- X. These privileges are to be respected everywhere.

Given in the city of Gatscina, September 6, 1800:

Signed by his own hand, PAUL.\*\*

\* The 65 Desjatinen according to Smith, 160 acres; Kaufman, 175 acres; Lohrenz, 180 acres; Janzen, 200 acres. Friesen sets 1 Desjatine equal to 2.7 acres and the land grant would have amounted to 175.5 acres.

\*\* Paul I died in 1801 assassinated by his enemies. His son, Alexander I, then became Czar. He was a far better ruler than his father or grandmother had been. Alexander I sponsored the printing and spreading of the Bible in the Russian empire.



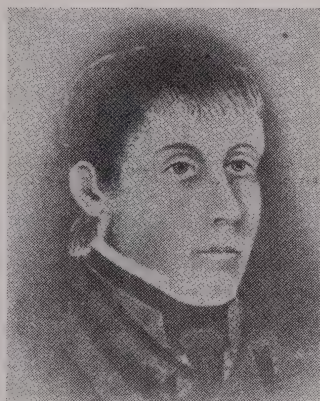
There was much rejoicing in the colonies when the Privilegium was received. In the meantime, the more prosperous land owners had also received permission to leave Prussia and these fared much better than the first groups. Each year, long wagon trains, loaded with household goods and farm implements, crossed Poland to go to the Mennonite colonies in Russia. As a result village after village was added to the original Chortitza and Molotschna settlements. Baron von Trappe had told the emigrants that they would not only give them religious freedom but would also build churches for them and the first churches erected in the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies were actually built at the cost of the Russian Crown. They were told that the government wished them to unite as one Mennonite body but this did not come to pass. They had been divided into the Flemish (conservative) and Frisian (liberal) groups and these factions continued in Russia. To the Molotschna settlement, Czar Alexander I, gave 6,000 rubles for the construction of churches and the first church was built at Orloff in 1809. The settlers, however did not only build churches but also breweries. The Halbstadt village was settled in 1804 and in 1809 it is reported to have had three vinegar factories and a brewery.

Establishing homes on the barren steppes of the Ukraine was not easy but most of the immigrants came with a determination to work. They planted trees and crops and soon they were able to reap. The farmers had to cut their grain and hay with scythes. It is reported that "housewives, if there were not yet grown sons and daughters, took their nursing infants and other small children with them to the field and all day long tied the mown grain into bundles which they later set up in shocks. The children, age ten and younger, raked the scattered grain with a drag hayrake. The worst plague was that the sharp stubble wounded the children's tender naked feet. At the age of fourteen both boys and girls were begun to be looked upon as full workers."<sup>2</sup>



After the colonies became adjusted to the steppes of Russia, they improved greatly in agriculture, horticulture, and livestock raising. Much of this was due to the efforts of Johann Cornies. This young Mennonite had immigrated in 1805, his parents were poor and his education meager, but he had used every opportunity to increase his knowledge. He succeeded so well that at the age of twenty-eight he became the Agricultural Representative of all Mennonites in Russia. The government empowered Cornies to enforce progressive methods in farming, livestock breeding, orcharding, landscaping, and in education. Cornies is spoken of as an "intellectual giant of the first rank." His motto was: "Not the untried new; not the stubborn old: Middle street—Golden street."

### Two Great Leaders in South Russia



Johann Cornies 1729-1796



Bernhard Harder 1831-1884

The immigrants had the right to choose their language and to have their own schools but educationally their progress was very slow. In their village schools the German language was the medium of instruction with emphasis on only a few essential subjects. The teachers were poorly trained, poorly paid, and short terms of school were considered sufficient. A smattering knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic was all that was needed to teach—the teacher being at times a traveling apprentice or the herdsman of the village. Many were reluctant to make contributions for the schools, regarding a well-equipped and well-ordered farm as more important than education. Many firmly believed the silly adage: "Je gelehda, je vakehda." (The more you know, the worse you do.) After 1843 educational matters were placed under the direction of Johann Cornies and soon significant improvements were made. A society was formed to improve village schools and to promote advanced schools. Some of the reforms were: (1) The erection of model schoolhouses. (2) Compulsory school attendance. (3) Uniform textbooks and prescribed courses. (4) Teachers training schools. (5) The licensing of teachers. Other influential lead-



ers, besides Cornies were: Tobias Voth, Heinrich Heese, Heinrich Franz. In spite of much opposition the reforms resulted in a well established system of village schools and "Central" schools for the training of teachers.

The spiritual aspect of the colonies, too, was at low ebb. Although there was a church in nearly every village, where sermons were read on Sunday mornings, there was usually also a "drinking joint" at the other end of the village—open almost day and night. Church membership was necessary for marriage and was regarded as a matter of course—often not based on a new life. Factional quarrels persisted—some having been brought along from Holland and Prussia. The two groups; Flemish and Frisian, were intolerant towards each other. After a number of vain attempts at reconciliation the two groups had remained separate branches in the communities. The Flemish group especially was determined to maintain their separate identity, freely banning the other group, rebaptizing such as wished to transfer, and excommunicating those that intermarried with other branches. Many church services were lifeless and of the singing in the church in the Chortitz colony one said: "If only Christ would not be greeted with such disfigured singing, from which the angels must turn away in sorrow, because it hinders the spirit of worship."

Nevertheless, nearly every village had some pious men who protested against laxities and ignorance. From about 1850 on an evangelical movement swept through the colonies. Eloquent and influential preachers arose, such as Eduard Wuest (Pietist) and Bernard Harder (Mennonite) who spoke against the stifling formalism and decay. Wuest labored in a German non-Mennonite colony and frequently visited Mennonite churches and Mennonites attended his mission festivals. He began a far-reaching religious awakening which spread to the Mennonite colonies in Russia. He was a fiery speaker, preaching a vital and pietistic Christianity. Bernard Harder, an admirer of Wuest, also was a gifted speaker, a thorough teacher, and a poet of no mean ability. He composed more than eleven hundred poems and songs. His preaching was revolutionary, inspiring, and effective. He spoke with conviction and a thundering voice and he is spoken of as "the greatest evangelist and pulpit orator the Mennonites of Russia produced." His ministry is described as a "glowing testimony of great eloquence, mighty poetry, and a burning passion for the lost."\*

The spiritual awakening spread and in some areas resulted in small groups, desiring a more fervent type of religious expression than what the churches generally practiced, banding themselves together for Bible study and later into separate church organizations. This caused many disputings, dissensions, and bitter feelings but in the end led all churches into more religious activity. In spite of disputings and divisions, and even bannings

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\* The author's father was an ardent admirer of Harder's ministry and his poetry. Harder's sermon on the text: "**Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake,**" Amos 9:1, remained an unforgettable challenge to him.



and persecutions, the groups remained united on many essentials, and a compact entity, with strong basic convictions, intent to perpetuate their faith and practices.

Village after village was added to the original Chortitza and Molotschna settlements. By 1860 the Chortitza colony had expanded to eighteen villages and the Molotschna colony numbered fifty-five villages. The Mennonite population in Russia now had risen to about six thousand families or thirty thousand persons and their farm land consisted of 265,000 Desjatinen or 715,500



Dutch Windmill Farm Home, Blumenort Villgae

acres. "On the wide steppes where formerly neither water nor even one brush was a reminder of trees, there now arose fantastically one thriving village after another, there was found good and plentiful water, and there were beautifully laid out pastures and large herds of sheep, cattle, and horses of different and excellent breeds. Regrettably already for some time, as an evil cancer, the problem of the "landless" had made itself felt. Only about one third of the families owned "crown" land and this situation threatened to develop into a veritable class hatred."<sup>3</sup> By 1865 there were in the Molotschna colony 1,384 landed families and 2,356 landless families and 490 families were living on farms outside of the villages.<sup>4</sup>

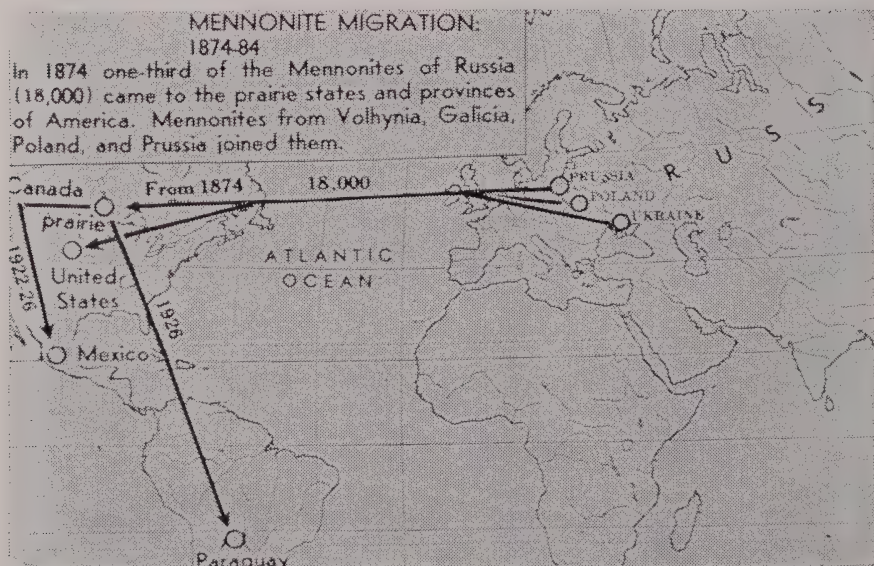
A recent study found that from the year 1787 up to 1870, besides isolated families, larger contingents of a total of 1,907 families had migrated from Prussia to Russia.<sup>5</sup> Of these families 400 had settled at Chortitza, 1,409 at Molotschna, 438 at Samara, and 20 at Vilna. By 1870 the total Mennonite population in Russia had risen to 45,000 persons. Of all the settlements the "Molotschna colony had become the favorite of the Russian governmental authorities."<sup>6</sup>

The farms of the settlers were grouped in small villages of from twenty to thirty families each, the farms located on each side of the village street. Invariably the house, barn, and stables were under one roof and all villages were arranged on the same plan.



Peace and Prosperity on the Molotschna

"Every house was surrounded by a garden, and in the midst of the village stood the schoolhouse and usually the church. Immediately around the village were the vegetable gardens and the forests, and after these came the meadows, and the grain fields. Order, diligence, and cleanliness were special characteristics of the people—a precious legacy inherited from their fathers."<sup>7</sup> Such conditions led to a state of affluency, complacency, and a sense of security but suddenly their doctrine of nonparticipation in militarism was again challenged and they found themselves compelled to look for a new home.



Courtesy Mennonite Life



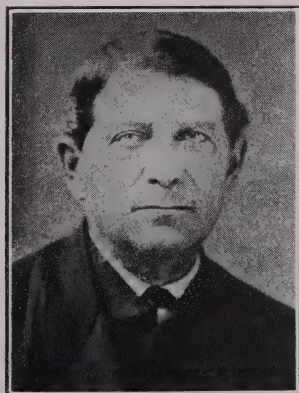
## FROM RUSSIA TO AMERICA

The Mennonites had prospered in Russia. A total of nine thousand had immigrated and these by 1870 had increased to five times that number. The government had granted them almost complete autonomy in educational, religious, economic, and civic affairs.

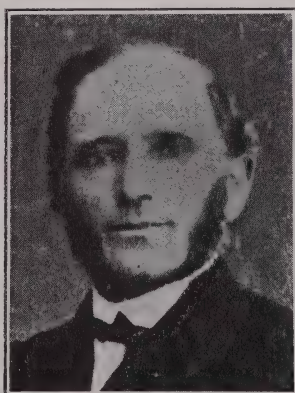
The spark that caused the emigration of one third of the Mennonites to America were new laws enacted by Russia. In 1870, Czar Alexander II, decided to abrogate the military exemptions which the Mennonites had been assured would last forever, but they were given ten years to emigrate if they wished to do so. This came as a great surprise to the colonies and caused great consternation among them. A deputation of six men was sent to St. Petersburg to petition for a continuance of the exemption privileges. Elder Leonard Suderman, of the Berdjansk Mennonite church was the spokesman of the delegation but neither he nor the others could speak Russian. The deputies were told bluntly that if they could not concede to do army sanitation service, they would have to find themselves a new home. Two other committees were sent to the nation's capitol to plead for exemptions but with little success. They were censored by the officials because only two committee members spoke a little Russian although their colony had been founded about seventy years ago.

At the Russian seaport, Berdjansk, also resided Cornelius Jansen, a Mennonite grain merchant and former Prussian Consul. Jansen was politically well informed and immediately realized that the new laws would endanger the Mennonite peace position. Subsequently, he undertook to inform the colonists of their changed status. He and Suderman felt that unless the Russian govern-

### Two Immigration Leaders



Elder Leonard Suderman  
Berdjansk Mennonite Church



Courtesy Mennonite Book Concern  
Consul Cornelius Jansen  
Exiled from Russia in 1873



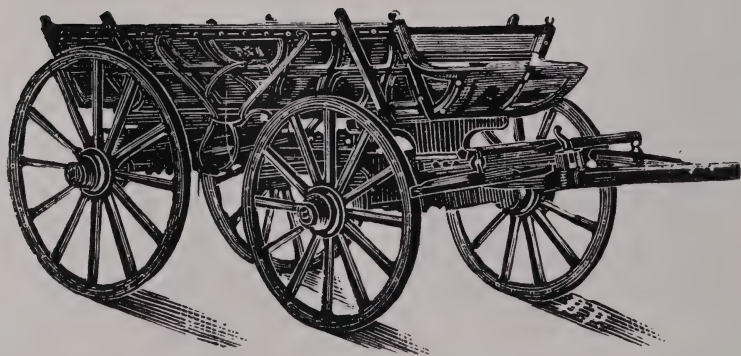
ment would give the Mennonites complete exemption from military duties, they must find themselves new homes.

When all appeals appeared futile a deputation was elected and instructed to look for a new place of religious freedom. At this time North America had vast stretches of fertile prairies that waited to be settled and the Mennonites were invited to come to this land of "religious freedom and unlimited opportunities." At first Elder Suderman had grave doubts about the advisability of emigrating to the "wild" America. He said America was, "a country interesting for the adventurer and an asylum for convicts." Good for people "who had their pockets full of revolvers but not for nonresistant people." Jansen from the first preferred America. Soon thousands felt that the time had come to migrate to a new home across the Atlantic. Entire ship loads of people left Europe who had loved their homes dearly but who were ready to make tremendous sacrifices in order to maintain their faith.

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- 1 P. M. Friesen, *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland* (1789-1919).
- 2 *Ibid*, p. 145.
- 3 *Ibid*, p. 102.
- 4 *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Volume III.
- 5 V. H. Quiring, *Mennonite Life*, April 1951.
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A Narrow Gauge Russian Wagon

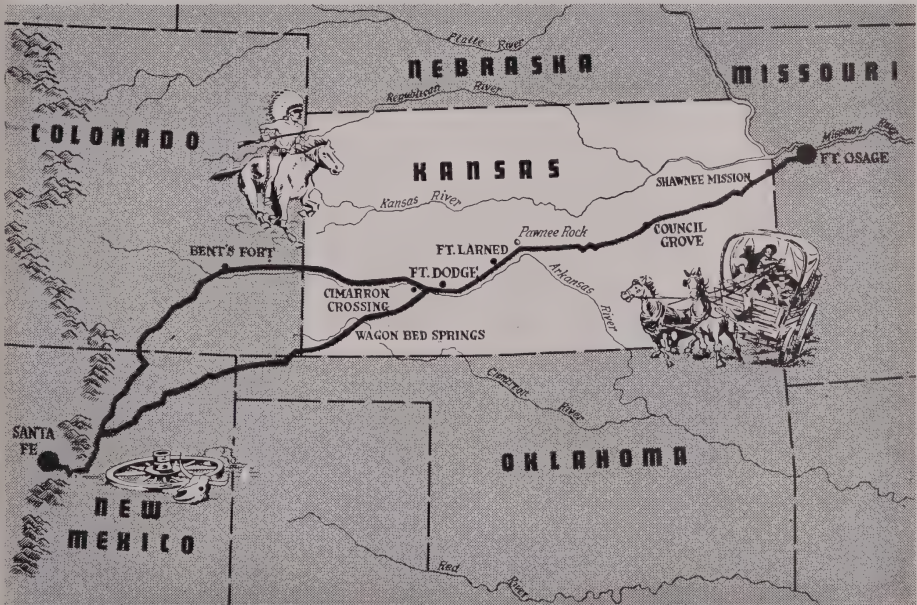
## CHAPTER II

### Way Preparers

*Thou Shalt Prepare Thee A Way—Jehovah*

#### The Stage is set for the Immigrants

In 1860 the Mennonites in Russia and Prussia were living in a state of peace and affluency, unaware that within a little more than a decade, more than one third of their homes would be uprooted and transplanted to a new world across the Atlantic. In America a westward movement was gaining momentum, the loadstones of which were cattle, gold, land, and the buffalo. In the midwest states the only means of transportation across a vast prairie was a primitive wagon road, the **Santa Fe Trail**. Govern-



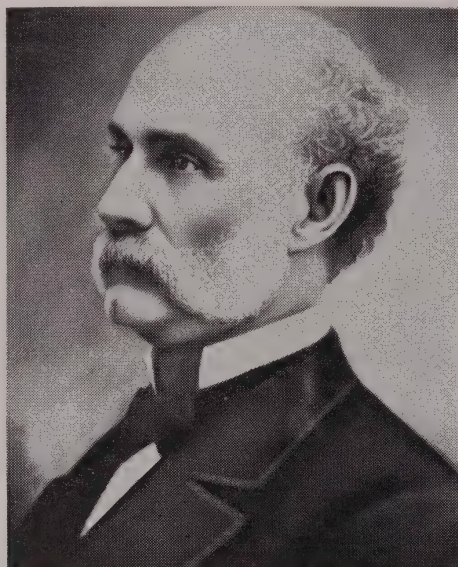
#### THE SANTA FE TRAIL

ment surveyors had laid out the route in 1825, starting at Franklin, Missouri, and ending at Santa Fe, New Mexico, a distance of nine hundred miles. The remarkable road played a vital part in America's expansion, for it opened the Southwest to traders and to settlers. Although little more than a crude winding trail of deep wagon ruts and thousands of cattle tracks, it became a highway of colonization and the forerunner of one of America's great railways.

In 1863 a bill in the United States Congress made possible the construction of railroads across vast acres of virgin prairies.

The bill specified a huge Land Grant for the aiding and construction of railroads: **"Every alternate section of land, designated by odd numbers, for ten sections in width on each side of said railroads and each of its branches."**<sup>1</sup> A further significant clause stated that **"if the roads are not completed within ten years, the lands shall revert to the United States."** This grant gave the Santa Fe Railroad three million acres in Kansas, extending from near Emporia, Kansas, west to the Colorado state line.

Ground was broken for the construction of the Santa Fe Railroad in late 1868. There was a little opening ceremony in Topeka, Kansas, attended by some twenty citizens, and a pile of dirt was thrown up. The first president of the Santa Fe line, Cyrus K. Holliday, a man of great vision and great courage, mounted the pile and predicted that those present would see a railroad completed to Santa Fe, New Mexico. This remark was greeted with laughter and derision.\*



Cyrus Kurz Holliday

Courtesy Santa Fe

Holliday's vision and courage made the Santa Fe Railroad a reality. He came to Topeka in 1854, having previously told his wife of his ambition to build a railroad. He was trained as a lawyer and immediately organized a town company. "For the next nine years Holliday wore out his shoes tramping from office to office of capitalists in quests of funds, encountering rebuffs and ridicule, but he

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\* The Santa Fe has become the longest line in the United States with 13,084 miles of tracks. It reached Santa Fe in 1880 and was completed to Fresno, California, October 5, 1896.



wasn't defeated."<sup>2</sup> Holliday had three objectives in his life: To help in the cause against slavery; to found a town (Topeka), and to build a railroad to Santa Fe, New Mexico.



Topeka, Kansas, in 1870—State Capitol under construction

The first locomotive for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company, the **C. K. Holliday**, reached Topeka in March, 1869. At that time Kansas and the western states were still "Buffalo country" but Holliday and other far-sighted men believed that



Courtesy Santa Fe Railroad

Stage Coach and Train Traveling Side by Side

the prairies would make good farm land. They reasoned that if the land supported millions of buffalos it would have the potentiality to support thousands of farms, towns, and great cities.

The buffalo existed in such vast numbers as to delay the passage of the railroad trains. An 1873 writer says: "Only those who

looked on the herds of the buffalo as they have often appeared a few years ago, when all the immense sweep of the prairie taken in the vision would be closely covered with them—on all sides stretching away to the horizon, and in the dim distance appearing like a dark mantle spread over the plains—can form an adequate idea of the number sometimes gathered in such assemblages.”<sup>3</sup>

#### 40,000 Buffalo Hides—1874



Photo Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society

**The Last Shipment Of Buffalo Hides From Dodge City**

With the coming of the railroads the buffalo became extinct for three reasons: (1) The animals were killed for their meat. In 1873, from November to next April, 2,000,000 pounds of buffalo meat were shipped from the Kansas prairies alone. The price was from \$50 to \$80 per ton in bulk. (2) The country was flooded with “hide hunters.” From Kansas 125,000 hides were shipped east in 1874. The animals were slaughtered in large numbers—sometimes leaving the meat to rot. (3) Finally when the buffalo became scarcer, hundreds of men went out “Bone picking”—gathering and selling buffalo skeletons for fertilizer. The skeletons of more than thirty million buffalos were shipped east.<sup>4</sup> From Hays City alone, in May, 1875, the shipment of bones amounted to twenty tons a day.<sup>5</sup> N. L. Prentis says: “At first the buffalo in their migrations came near, wandering up to the settler’s door, but as the vast herds which had furnished the Indians with food and clothing for untold centuries, without apparent diminution, retreated westward he followed them, making an annual campaign against them in



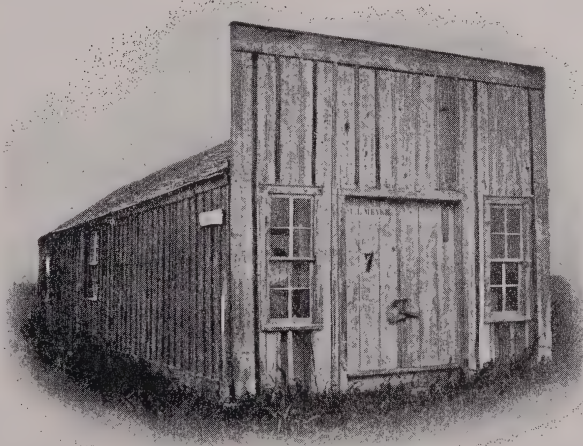
his wagon, which he loaded with meat. When there was nothing left of them save their bleaching bones, he gathered these up and hauled them to the distant railroad station, where they accumulated in great white piles."

When in the fall of 1874 large numbers of Mennonite immigrants came to Kansas there were still vast herds of buffalo roaming the prairies. A **Hutchinson History** clipping gives the following report: "October 28, 1874: 'Countless thousands of buffalo have made their appearance in the Arkansas valley, traveling in a northerly direction and crossing the rails of the A. T. & S. F. railway. Trains have been obliged to stop for these animals to get out of the way. The herd is stretched along the valley for a distance of about one hundred miles.'"

On June 29, 1875, G. W. Ganly still killed a buffalo within six miles of McPherson but in a few years the buffalo was almost extinct. In 1888, C. J. Jones sold the last buffalo remaining in Kansas to a party in New York.<sup>6</sup> Later buffalos were again brought to Kansas and placed under protection in wild life preserves.

Until March, 1870, the Santa Fe had built only twenty-eight miles of railroad. By August it reached Emporia, thirty-four miles farther on. During 1871 the line was extended to Newton, another distance of seventy-five miles. The name Newton was adopted from Newton, Massachusetts, where some of the Santa Fe stockholders lived. The town had its beginning in 1870 when a house 20 feet by 80 feet, owned by A. F. Horner, was moved from Florence to Newton. Town promoters offered lots free for the first dwelling erected in the frontier towns and in order to win

### The Thrice Moved Horner Building



This building was moved to Hutchinson in 1872 to win the first lot, accommodate the first post office, the first hotel, the first store, and Hutchinson's real estate office. From the Hon. C. C. Hutchinson the town derived its name and from this humble structure the city of Hutchinson started.



these lots, Horner first had his house in Florence, then moved it to Newton, and from there to Hutchinson — winning in turn the lots offered in each town.

An immense cattle trade was waiting in central Kansas to pass over new railroad lines. From 1867, Abilene had marked the end of the Texas cattle trail. When the Santa Fe came to Newton, the cattle trade shifted to Newton from 1871 to 1873 and later to Wichita, and in 1875 to Dodge City. "At all of these points the sale and shipment of cattle rarely fell under 200,000 a year."<sup>7</sup> Newton was known as the toughest cow town on the frontier—a town of saloons, dance halls, and gambling houses. One writer said: "The air of Newton is tainted with the hot steam of human blood."<sup>8</sup> Fifty persons were estimated to have found violent death during its first two years in its saloons and dives.



COL. W. WHEELER'S HERD, EN ROUTE FOR KANSAS PACIFIC RAILWAY

Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society.

One of the first herds driven over the Chisholm Trail from Texas to Abilene, Kansas

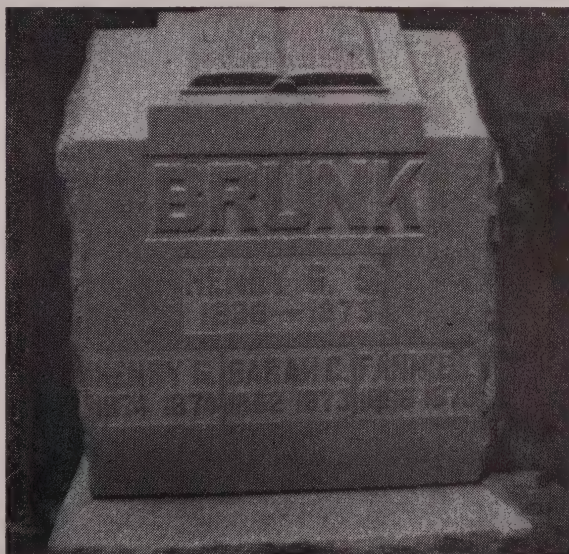
When the railroad came to Newton, Wichita was a mere village but some men believed that it might become a city of importance. After the Indians had left central Kansas in 1869, traders and homesteaders began to cluster around the confluence of the Big and Little Arkansas rivers. The hamlet was called "**Wichita Town**" after the Wichita Indians. In 1870 the town was incorporated as Wichita and only one year later it was already recognized as a third class city. In 1872 a group of railroad promoters constructed a branch line from Newton to Wichita—the branch soon to be purchased by the Santa Fe.

The Land Grant specified that the Santa Fe must reach the Colorado state line within ten years or the grant would be forfeited. Nine years later only 127 miles had been completed and 285 more miles remained to be built. Furious activity now developed. By the 5th of June, 1872, the line operated to Hutchinson; by August 5th, up to Great Bend; by September 19th, to Dodge City, and by

December 28th, cars ran over the entire state from Missouri to Colorado. Thousands of acres of fertile soil were now waiting for settlers.

Meanwhile the Santa Fe had been surveying and appraising their land under the direction of A. E. Touzalin. This man also directed the selling of the land, and at Marion Center\* he had appointed Case and Billings as agents. A great selling campaign was launched which reached to Europe. In 1870, Case and Billings sold 5,000 acres of Santa Fe land to Malcolm W. Keim, a Mennonite from Pennsylvania, the first Mennonite settler in Kansas.

Soon a few eastern Mennonite families began to be attracted to Kansas by the Homestead Act of 1869. In 1871, Daniel, Christian, and Margaret Kilmer of Elkhart county, Indiana, settled in the southeastern part of McPherson county. In May, 1872, Bishop Daniel Brundage came from Tipton, Missouri, and settled one mile west of Marion County line, near to the Kilmers. These settlers became the nucleus of the Spring Valley settlement. In June, 1872, Reuben J. Heatwole came from Virginia and settled on a homestead six miles west of Marion Center. A month later the Noah Good family came from Clarinda, Iowa, and bought land south-east of Marion Center and Benjamin Baer came from Indiana and joined the Good community and became the son-in-law of Noah Good. On September 13, 1873, the Henry G. Brunk family of eight arrived on a prairie schooner from Illinois and settled on a



This tombstone marks the first four Mennonite graves in Kansas. The cemetery is located between Marion and Hillsboro on U. S. Highway 56. The well-known evangelist, Rev. George H. Brunk, of Denbigh, Virginia, is a son of one of the surviving Brunk children.

\* Called Marion Center because it was near the center of Marion County. The county was named for General Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox" of the American Revolution. In 1882 the name was officially changed to Marion.

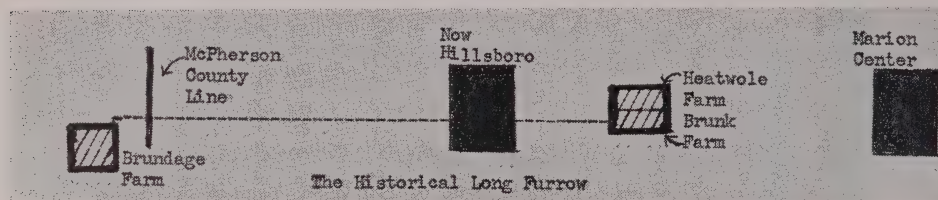


farm immediately adjoining the Heatwole homestead. Brunk was ill at the time of his arrival and died of typhoid fever eight days later. During the next months three of the Brunk children also died of the same fever and all four lie buried in a cemetery in a corner of the Brunk homestead. In the fall of 1873 the Henry Hornberger family arrived from Pennsylvania and started the Catlin Mennonite settlement northwest of Peabody.

All of this area in Central Kansas had but few inhabitants and it appears that Bishop Brundage and Reuben Heatwole plowed the historic "Long Furrow" as Heatwole says:

*"So we might find our course along the furrow back and forth to worship together without losing the way along which there was nothing to break the monotony of the journey save the flocks of prairie chickens, and the small herds of antelopes cantering from us in the distance."*<sup>9</sup>

### The Long Furrow



The road used by Brundage and Heatwole. From Marion Center to the Brundage homestead was about twenty-two miles and from the Heatwole farm to the Brundage farm about fourteen miles. During the pioneer years Bishop Brundage served four settlements alternately, traveling in a two-wheel springless cart. He was known as "Old Faithful Bishop Brundage." Heatwole also had homesteaded his farm and was known as the "Singing Evangelist."

In the spring of 1874, Eli M. Yoder, an Amish youth from Pennsylvania, purchased three hundred and twenty acres south of Hutchinson. Yoder married a non-Mennonite and attempted to keep his former affiliation a secret but had in his possession a "long tailed" coat and "barn door" trousers. When the railroad was built through his farm the little town of Yoder had its beginning. In this region later several Amish settlements developed. All of the early Mennonite settlers came from the eastern states and consisted of single families. The Mennonite migrations to Kansas did not gain significance until the large groups from Europe arrived in 1874.

As a result of contacts with the early settlers the Santa Fe railroad had become aware of certain developments across the Atlantic and saw great possibilities in bringing Mennonites from Europe to Kansas. They had discovered that the Mennonites were professional farmers; just what the country and railroad needed. They had heard that these people had both, the training and the capital, and that they were a thrifty and honest class of people that would make desirable colonizers. Immediately strategic plans were launched.

Circumstances at this stage favored Touzalin, the Santa Fe Colonization Director. He had chanced to know at Lawrence an



energetic implement dealer, named Carl Bernhard Schmidt, who spoke German fluently and had a convincing personality. Schmidt was approached and invited to join the Santa Fe as Colonization Agent and he enthusiastically accepted. The Santa Fe was now ready and determined to invite, solicit, and entice prospective settlers—preferably Mennonites, to settle on the vast acres of virgin Kansas prairies.

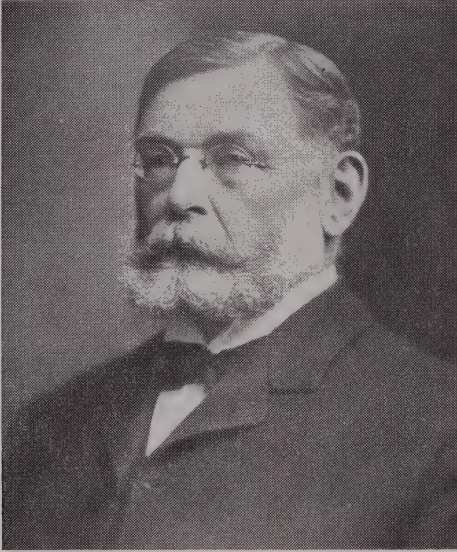


Photo Kansas Historical Society

Carl Bernhard Schmidt

The German speaking immigration agent of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe. Christian Krehbiel describes Schmidt as "a dapper young man who came from Dresden, Germany, and had come to Kansas at the age of twenty-one." Colonel Ed Haran, pioneer immigration agent, said of Schmidt: "In my estimation no man in the history of Kansas has done a greater service for the state than C. B. Schmidt did when he brought the Mennonites here to live."

## THE BEGINNING OF THE MIGRATIONS

The first Mennonites to leave Russia to investigate America were four young men who traveled for pleasure, for experience, and to look over settlement possibilities. They were Jacob Boehr, age thirty, and three younger men; Philip Wiebe, Peter Dyck, and Bernard Warkentin. They came in the summer of 1872 and while traveling in Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska, Warkentin's wife died in Russia. When Warkentin heard the crushing news he decided to stay at Summerfield, Illinois for the winter. At Summerfield was a well established Mennonite church under the leadership of Christian Krehbiel. The three other men returned to Europe and reported on their trip. Warkentin wrote letters to his friends which were eagerly received and sent from village to village.

Cornelius Jansen, as noted, sensed the implications of the new military laws and explained matters to his co-religionists. He published pamphlets on nonresistance and was subsequently expelled from Russia on May 22, 1873—never to return. This, however, accelerated the emigrations instead of retarding them. The news of Jansen's expulsion quickly spread throughout the colonies and helped the Mennonites to realize their precarious position under the new laws. Jansen went to America and became a contact between two countries. He has been called the Moses who led his people to the "promised land."

In the summer of 1873, twelve delegates came to America to inspect land for colonization. The deputation consisted of: Jacob Buller and Leonard Suderman, Molotschna delegates; Wilhelm Ewert, Prussian delegate; Andreas Schrag (layman), Swiss delegate; Tobias Unruh, Polish delegate; Jacob Peters (Oberschultz), Cornelius Buhr (farmer), and Heinrich Wiebe, Bergthal delegates; Cornelius Toeys and David Klassen, Kleine Gemeinde delegates; and Paul and Lohrenz Tschetter, Hutterite delegates. The deputies left Europe in April, and landed in New York, May 22, 1873.

The suggestion to make such a tour came from William Hespeler, a Canadian immigration agent of German birth, who was visiting his former home in Germany in the summer of 1872. Hespeler was instructed by Canada to visit the Mennonites in Russia and to assure them, in case of emigration, of a hearty welcome to Canada. At the same time, John Fretz Funk, Elkhart, Indiana, in his paper, **Herald of Truth**, also suggested that the Mennonites send deputies to investigate America.

At first the delegates traveled in three groups but in June all met at Fargo, North Dakota. Together with Hespeler and Jacob Y. Schantz of the Ontario Mennonites, and John F. Funk of Elkhart, the representatives traveled by boat on the Red River to Winnipeg, for a tour of Manitoba. The Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde delegates felt that Manitoba would be the best place. They liked the large uninhabited stretches of land in Canada where they would be able to live in compact but isolated communities.

The other delegates believed Canada would not satisfy their constituencies and soon returned to the states. Ewert felt that in Canada there were "too many half-breeds, grasshoppers, mosquitoes, wet land, and cold winters." They inspected Minnesota, Dakota, and Nebraska and again divided into three groups. The Tschetters and Unruh went to Indiana; Schrag and Suderman, accompanied by Schantz left for Pennsylvania, and Buller and Ewert with Christian Krehbiel departed for a tour of Kansas and Texas. With C. B. Schmidt, often called the "Moses of the Mennonites" as guide, they spent a week inspecting land. D. W. Wilder in **Annals of Kansas** reports: "On August 5, 1873, five Mennonite leaders visited Harvey, Sedgwick, Reno and McPherson counties to select land for a colony from Russia."

All deputies were favorably impressed with the vast regions of prairies in the states and in Canada. On August 20, 1873, they met in New York to embark for their return voyage. All twelve

avored emigrating. As soon as they returned with their favorable reports, preparations were begun for a mass exodus across the Atlantic. Properties were sold, passports applied for, and household goods and implements packed, while some meticulous farmers set their children to the tedious task of selecting kernel by kernel, plump grain and vegetable seeds for plantings in the new world.

The emigration fever spread like wildfire. "Across the Great Atlantic" became the prayer of sincere freedom seekers as well as the longing of some looking for adventure or better economic opportunities. Even before the deputies returned, a few adventurous souls had launched out across the ocean. On June 26, 1873 Jacob Rempel purchased five thousand acres near Council Grove, Kansas; the first purchase of land by a Mennonite immigrant from Russia.<sup>10</sup>

In 1873, Peter and Jacob Funk came to America and at their arrival met the deputies in the New York harbor just before the deputation left. They came to Kansas accompanied by Christian Krehbiel and A. S. Johnson of the Santa Fe.\* The Funks bought two sections of land, eight miles northwest of Marion Center, along the North Cottonwood River. With this purchase Krehbiel reports; "the die was cast for Kansas." They bought the land for \$2.50 per acre and when they paid in cash it came out that they had with them \$50,000. Immediately they were cautioned against carrying money and those traveling with them wondered what might have happened if the leering greedy eyes within Newton and Florence had known.\*\* The remaining funds were promptly deposited in a bank. Adjoining the Funk sections, Krehbiel reserved one for himself, but later relinquished this to Wilhelm Ewert. The three liked Kansas because, "It had a longer warm season in which to do the necessary farm work than farther north and it would take fewer clothes, less fuel, and less winter fodder."<sup>11</sup>

In October Christian Krehbiel came again with a group to Kansas among whom were Bernard Warkentin, Heinrich Flaming, and Johannes Fast, a school teacher from Crimea. Of this trip Krehbiel writes: "It was easy to see that the region about Marion Center abounded in good soil and had pleasing streams and gentle hills and valleys. We were particularly taken by the valley in which the Wiebe Krimmer Bruedergemeinde lies. Though our group preferred to locate near to a railroad and I had in my mind selected Halstead as the spot.\*\*\* I was strongly tempted to make a tentative reservation here for the Summerfield membership. However, Fast who, as noted, was traveling with us, and had been com-

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\* A. S. Johnson was the son of an Indian missionary and believed to be the first white child born in Kansas. Johnson succeeded Touzalin as Santa Fe Colonization Director

\*\* Florence was the first railroad town in Marion county and had its beginning in 1870, named after Florence Crawford, daughter of Samuel J. Crawford, third governor of Kansas. Florence Crawford became the wife of Governor and Senator Arthur Capper.

\*\*\* Halstead was the next railroad stop west of Marion, named after a prominent journalist in the eastern states.



missioned by Wiebe's congregation in Russia to reserve suitable land for that body, and as he found it very hard to make a decision, he appealed to me to do it for him. Waving our interest in the tract I recommend that he reserve it for his church body, which he did."

In the meantime the editor of the **Herald of Truth** had been busy disseminating knowledge of the plight of the Mennonites in Russia. With his American brethren he pled for "the brethren on the other side of the Great Water." Untiringly this preacher and writer aided the migration movement. Some thirty years later a son of Cornelius Jansen wrote to John F. Funk: "I say it without desire to flatter you that no one has done more, yes, I might say as much, for our people than yourself; and no one has served more unselfishly." In 1873, Funk was in the prime of his life, well informed, and dedicated to serve. To the American Mennonites he pointed out that in the event of an actual migration of large numbers of European Mennonites the churches should think seriously of their responsibilities. He wrote:

*Let the church not be behind in good works and good words and a friendly welcome,, with willing hearts to help if need be. Whether old or new Mennonites, Reformed Mennonites, Evangelical Mennonites, Swiss Mennonites, Amish Mennonites, or by whatsoever other peculiar name they may be known."*<sup>12</sup>

A meeting was held at Summerfield on December 2, 1873, to coordinate aid efforts. Some had already appealed for help and it became evident that help would be needed. A **Western Board of Guardians** was established with Christian Krehbiel, president; David Goerz, secretary; John F. Funk, treasurer; and Bernard War-kentin, agent. This committee was to cooperate with the Eastern Aid Committee and the Canadian Aid committee. These committees were to negotiate with railroads, help to obtain passes, speed up collections and gifts, meet the immigrants on arrival, and inform and invite the cooperation of all traditional peace churches. By September, 1874, the three committees had deposited \$42,000 in New York banks but this was only the beginning of a total of more than \$150,000 collected for immigrants.

In the meantime the railroad officials had been busy contacting the deputies and other immigration leaders. Rumors and reports were spreading that shiploads of Mennonites were applying for passports and preparing to come to American shores. The Santa Fe in Kansas, the Burlington in Nebraska, and the Great Northern railways up into Canada were throbbing with excitement, each determined to entice the newcomers. On August 9, 1873, the **Topeka Commonwealth** jokingly stated: "It is not likely that all the Mennonites will come here, but a thousand or so will, and one thousand people in Kansas, including the women who don't want any offices, is a thing so startling that they will be able readily to collect twenty-five cents at every farm gate, as admittance to a sight of people compared to whom Barnum's cannibals are tame and uninteresting."

But not all was well in America. One writer reports: "In 1873 occurred the great panic which inaugurated a prolonged de-

pression of world-wide proportions."<sup>13</sup> This panic was followed by a severe drought in 1874. Then a most devastating calamity struck the midwest. Apalling hordes of grasshoppers came from the Rocky Mountain regions—sometimes passing over—sometimes annihilating the helpless crops.

In the summer of 1874 the innumerable army of destruction arrived. Several weeks before an entire Crimean church body had landed at Elkhart, Indiana, and while the grasshoppers did their fiendish work of destruction in Kansas, the "Crimean Country Seekers" prayed earnestly for Divine guidance into a "promised land."

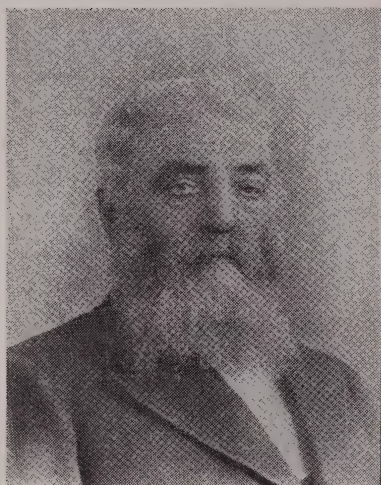
And in the providence of God, the Santa Fe Trail and the exodus of the Indians; the railroads and the churches; the panic and the drought, and even the grasshopper invasion, prepared the way for thousands of home seekers.

## Chapter II References

- 1 Glenn Banford Bradley, **The Story of the Santa Fe**, p. 62.
- 2 **Santa Fe Bulletin**, April, 1949.
- 3 **Kansas State Board of Agriculture Report**, 1874.
- 4 N. L. Prentis, **Kansas History**, p. 180.
- 5 *Ibid*, p. 128.
- 6 *Ibid*, p. 180.
- 7 *Ibid*, p. 158.
- 8 **Topeka Commonwealth**, August 21, 1871.
- 9 Melvin Gingerich, **Mennonite Life**, July, 1949.
- 10 C. Henry Smith, **The Coming of the Russian Mennonites**, p. 66.
- 11 C. Krahn, **From the Steppes to the Prairies**, p. 66.
- 12 John F. Funk's Autobiography.
- 13 James C. Malin, **Winter Wheat**.



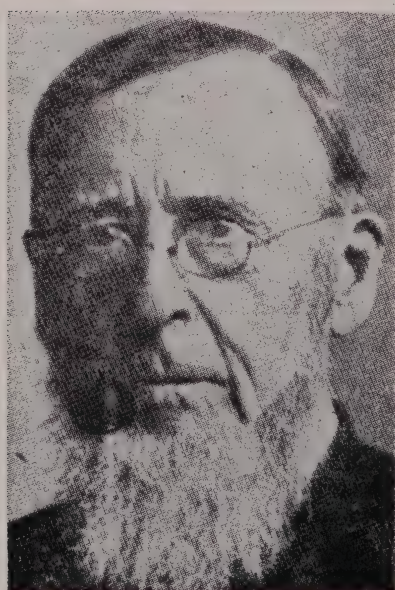
**The Western Mennonite Board of Guardians  
Organized December 2, 1873**



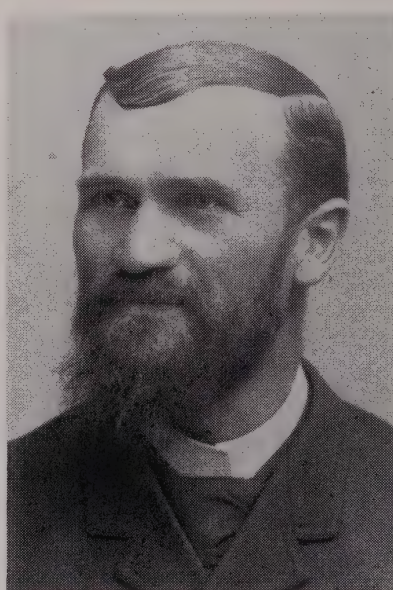
**Christian Krehbiel, President  
Elder, Summerfield Church**



**Bernard Warkentin, Agent  
Halstead Miller**



**John F. Funk, Treasurer  
Editor, Herald of Truth**



**David Goerz, Secretary  
Editor, Zur Heimat**



## CHAPTER III

### The Grasshopper Invasion

*And the grasshopper shall be a burden—Solomon*

Nothing so devastating had happened in Kansas before. On the 6th day of August, 1874,<sup>1</sup> on a bright summer afternoon the sun became strangely hazy and speedily darkened so that chickens



hurriedly took to their roosts. Yet there was no sign of rain or of a dust storm. Men cultivating their fields stopped their oxen or teams and looked into the skies with apprehension. Women in their pioneer shanties noticed the strange shadows and wondered where the clouds had suddenly come from. They heard a whirling noise in the sky, which grew louder as the shadows increased, and soon there was a pelting on the roof and ground as of hail falling—but this was not hail—these were living creatures, green

and brown, two and three inches long, that planted themselves on corn stalks, grains, trees, and even on persons that ventured out.

At first the people were too stunned to grasp the extent of the terrible calamity but when they saw that this time there were millions of these creatures that kept restlessly milling about, attacking crops and stripping trees of leaves, a great fear struck their hearts. This enemy was invincible.

Not many years ago the Midwest settler had constantly been in fear of the incursions of a ruthless, unpredictable enemy. One who came and went with the uncertainty of the wind, a scalping knife in his belt and a tomahawk in hand—the marauding Indian.

At other times roaming buffalo herds in great number had endangered their crops and more recently herds of fleet antelopes. Always, during the summer months, the pioneer settlers feared the scourge of the prairies—the prairie fire, and they had learned to cope with such catastrophies. But with the locusts men were impotent. All efforts to drive out this invader or even to stem the tide proved utterly futile.

Hastily things were carried under cover and doors and windows shut. Had the Egyptian plagues come to devour them? **“For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the tree.”** (Exodus 10:15.) The locusts ate until the leaves were gone and only bare stalks remained. They crawled and hopped, gnawed and chewed, and fed until everything edible was devoured. When

## Monument to the Last White Person Killed by Indians in Central Kansas



In 1869, eighteen-year-old Ed Miller was killed by Cheyennes on the Old Santa Fe Trail about one mile west of the Marion-McPherson county line. Miller volunteered to carry the mail, replacing the "Pony Express" carrier. The youth said, "If I get killed there will not be a widow and children left without a provider." The regular mail carrier erected this monument in honor to Miller's memory. The marker is located in a cemetery about one-half mile north of U. S. Highway 56.

night fell the grasshoppers were still eating but after dark they disappeared as suddenly and as mysteriously as they had come.

The settlers claimed that at places the ground was covered with grasshoppers several inches deep and that trees were loaded so heavily that limbs broke. Christian Hirschler, a Mennonite, who had settled in the Moundridge region in the spring of 1874, tried "to save some corn by cutting and shocking it, but the grasshoppers ate even the shocks. Insects lay so thick on the railroad tracks that the engines slipped and stalled. Throughout that part of Kansas and as far as Tipton, Missouri, the pest left everything bare and black."<sup>2</sup> Prentis states that "As a spectacle the approach of the winged destroyers was sufficiently terrifying and the destruction of vegetation was complete."<sup>3</sup>

Two days after the invasion on August 8, 1874, the **Marion County Record** reported with much bravado: "At least 100,000,000,000,000,000,000 grasshoppers passed this place last Thursday evening. We won't come down a single grasshopper." Then in a more serious vein, editor E. W. Hoch, who later ably served as governor, continued: "Fields of corn 80 and 100 acres that a week ago were full of promise of a fine return are to-day consumed. Down through Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas this army of destruction came."

The grasshopper had done its evil work. Millions had died and millions had lifted their wings for greener pastures. Not a green plant was left, but rivers were clogged with dead grasshoppers and the water in the creeks turned brown and foul so that horses and cattle did not want to drink it. The stench of dead grasshoppers filled the air for many days and for many miles. Thousands of pioneer farmers had become destitute and utterly discouraged.\*

It was fortunate that such a devastating and terrifying plague had never come to the Midwest before, and that most of the Menonite immigrants had not yet arrived, and that the immigrants heard little of the terrible catastrophe. And it was even more fortunate that when the immigrants came, and heard, and saw, —they had the supreme faith that the grasshoppers would not return.\*\*

### Grasshoppers Stalling a Train



Sketch by A. P. Smith

Courtesy Kansas Historical Society

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\* The 1875 State Board of Agriculture Report states: "Owing to the locust visitation last fall, there was quite an immigration to other states."

\*\* Grasshoppers have returned but not in such devastating proportions. A Menonite immigrant brushed grasshoppers away with his hat and said, "Grasshoppers go to none but a good country."

### Chapter III References

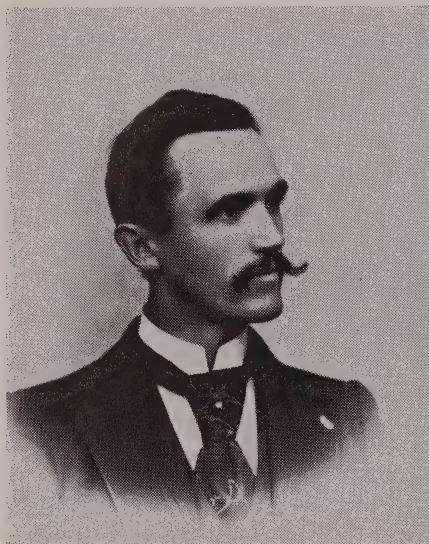
- 1 **Marion County Record**, August 8, 1874.
- 2 Christian Krehbiel's Autobiography.
- 3 Noble L. Prentis, **Kansas History**, p. 150.



## MEMORIES OF THE GREAT SCOURGE OF 1874

by Ferdinand J. Funk\*

The opening date of this devastating experience was the sixth day of August, as bright and sunny a day as any summer day ever was in Kansas. Not a cloud in the sky or even a hint of a cloud on the low horizon. That's the way it was until about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Then the sky suddenly became hazy and speedily darkened until in a matter of very few minutes, it was so dark that it not only frightened me but also did something to the chickens—they hastened for their roosts as fast as they could. They had never had occasion to go to roost in such a hurry at such an unseemly early hour.



F. J. Funk resides in Topeka, Kansas. He was 100 years old September 8, 1959. He is a member of the Presbyterian church and has served in the Kansas Legislature and in many other capacities.

All this happened in such an incredible short time that it hit my youthful mind with an indescribable feeling of awe and consternation, as of some terrible and disastrous catastrophe impending. What mysterious phenomenon of nature could it be that could transform the brightest day into the blackest darkness of night in so short a time? We quickly found out what it was that so appalled and terrified us. It was grasshoppers. With a whizzing, whirring sound they came from the northwest, and they came in unbelievable numbers—300 billion at least. They hit everything and they were no respecters of persons. In less than no time I was covered from head to foot, and where they hit the face or

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\* Ferdinand Funk had emigrated with his parents, from East Prussia in the spring of 1874 to Marion County. The event made an indelible impression on the fourteen-year-old lad. The Funk farm was located two miles north of Canada. The stone house built in the spring of 1874 is still inhabited and well kept.

hands, they hurt like impact by hard missiles, and they immediately commenced to eat on me and took several bites out of my ears before I could brush them off. They covered everything exposed and the ground was covered in some spots to a depth of four or more inches and trees along the creek were loaded with them so thickly that sizable limbs broke with the weight of them.

They fell into the creek that ran through our farm in such vast numbers as to form a high dam by drifting with the current against obstructions and damming up water. The water was made foul by the dead hoppers. It turned brown like coffee and cattle refused to drink it. Even the fish could not take it; they added to the foulness of the water. Not until the creek had been flooded by heavy rains did the water become normal again. When I now think of the way these hoppers sent chickens to their roosts in a hurry, I can see something funny about what seemed so terrible frightening at the time. It was but a short time until the hoppers had all come down out of the sky, and the sun was shining as bright as ever. Thereupon, the chickens immediately left their roosts and at once pounced those hoppers with a voracity that was not only fierce but positively funny to behold. They gorged themselves until their crops bulged out almost as big as their bodies and when they could not take any more, they stood around in a sad and mournful fashion as if grieving over their lack of capacity for taking on all there was before them.

The corn looked good for 50 bushels per acre until the hoppers lit on it that fateful day in August. By nightfall there was nothing left of it except about two feet of naked stalks, and by sunup the next day even those stalks were gone. When I awoke in the morning I found that the hoppers had eaten part of my straw hat. When I went to put it on, I found it in two parts—brim and crown—both quite useless. For voracity and capacity of eating, there are no creatures on all this earth like the hoppers. They ate many times their own weight and ate everything green except the grass. They just hopped that, and I suppose that is why they are called grasshoppers. They ate the harness on the horses' backs or hanging in the barn; they gnawed the wooden handles of forks and shovels, probably because the taste of the sweat of the hands found on them and which they seemed to like. They were not only most greedy and voracious, but they were also cannibalistic in their eating, and when they had devoured everything else, they devoured one another. (Excerpts from an article in the **Kansas Teacher**, October 1944.)

## CHAPTER IV

### Ships and Passports

*There go the ships—Psalms of David*

The first ship that brought some deputies was the **S. S. Silesia**. It landed in New York in May, 1873. Soon after, the ocean liner **Frisia** arrived with more deputies and a small group of colonizers from Crimea. They were Rudolf Riesen, David Goerz, J. J. Funk, Abraham Quiring, Johann Rempel, and Johann Regier. In August a ship brought Peter Funk, Jacob Funk, Heinrich Flaming, and Johannes Fast, who went to Kansas. A little later Daniel Unruh with the Schroeder and Voth families arrived and went to South Dakota and the Peters, Strauss, Penner, and Gloeckler families, at about the same time settled in Minnesota. On May 20, 1874, a steamer arrived with ten Swiss families, led by their former deputy, Andreas Schrag and settled at Yankton, South Dakota. In the same month the **Westphalia** landed with the former deputy, Wilhelm Ewert, and Franz Funk and Cornelius Jantz. These went to Kansas. On July 15, 1874, the **City of Brooklyn** steamed into the New York harbor with an entire Crimean church and four days later an **Allen Line** steamer arrived at Montreal with one hundred families of Kleine Gemeinde immigrants, led by their former deputies, Cornelius Toevs and David Klassen. At about the same time a large Bergthal contingent of eight hundred persons landed at Quebec on the **S. S. Nova Scotia**, led by their former deputy, Heinrich Wiebe. The last two groups settled in the Canadian Province of Manitoba.

A Modern Ocean Liner — The Ryndam; Holland-American Line



Ship after ship hurried across the Atlantic



On August 22, 1874, the **City of Chester** arrived at New York with five hundred and twenty-five immigrants and soon thereafter the **Red Star** liner, **The Colonia**, landed with one hundred and thirty-five immigrants.

The **Cimbria**, the **Teutonia**, the **City of Richmond**, the **Nederland**, the **Vaderland**, and the **Abbotsford** were either on their way to America with Mennonite immigrants or they were soon to leave Europe. Aid committees had obtained special rates from ship and railroad companies. The immigrants paid about \$80 per person for tickets and about \$50 per family for passes. The Western Board of Guardians had made contracts with the **Inman** line and the **Hamburg-American** line. Both companies operated between Hamburg and New York. The Pennsylvania Aid committee, represented by A. B. Shelly and Amos Herr, had arranged for special rates on the **Red Star** line, which ran its Dutch ships between Antwerp and Philadelphia. The Canadian Mennonite, J. Y. Schantz had made an agreement with the **Allen** line, operating from Hamburg to Liverpool and to Quebec.

During 1874 the Atlantic ship companies and railroad officials were feverishly busy. A. S. Johnson and C. B. Schmidt now represented the Santa Fe while A. E. Touzalin and Peter Jansen were employed by the Burlington railroad and Michael Hiller by the Northern Pacific lines. The Aid committees saw that the immigrations were proceeding much faster than expected and often found themselves at wit's end.

The first church body to arrive in America was the Crimean group, led by Jacob A. Wiebe. They were taken in charge by John F. Funk and the Santa Fe Agent, C. B. Schmidt. The second church group, the **Kleine Gemeinde**, arrived in Ontario, July 19, 1874, soon to be followed by a large Bergthal contingent.

The **Alexanderwohl** church also had decided to leave as a body. The largest contingent, led by Jacob Buller, consisted of four hundred and seventy-five emigrants and came to America on the **S. S. Cimbria**, landing at New York, August 27, 1874. The group at first considered locating in Nebraska and was routed to Lincoln and quartered in the state fair buildings. From here they inspected land—soon deciding for Kansas. A second contingent, consisting of three hundred and seven persons, embarked at Hamburg, August 16, on the **Teutonia**, led by Dietrich Gaeddert and Peter Balzer. This vessel was old and had been used as a coaling ship but to meet the urgent demand for transporting emigrants, it was hurriedly converted into passenger service. It landed at New York, September 2, and was met by David Goerz, Wilhelm Ewert and C. B. Schmidt. The contingent was directed to Topeka, Kansas and temporarily quartered in the **Kings Bridge Shops\*** while some men went to investigate settlement locations.

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\* The Shops covered three acres and had been erected by Zenas King for building bridges at Topeka and other places. The venture went bankrupt and the machinery had been removed to satisfy creditors. The Santa Fe rented the vacant shops to house the Mennonites and later purchased them for railroad shops.

Shortly after the **Cimbria** had landed and only one day after the **Teutonia** the **City of Richmond** arrived at New York on September 3. It brought Swiss Mennonite immigrants from Volhynia, Poland, led by Jacob Stucky. They were small farmers, laborers, and dairymen. Some had needed help to emigrate. Some of the contingent stayed in Pennsylvania to work off their ship indebtedness, some went to Dakota, but sixty-two families decided to settle in Kansas. They came to Peabody, where the women and children remained in town, while the men set out on foot to look for a suitable place for settlement.

A large group from Ostrog, Poland, led by Tobias Unruh, decided to leave Europe in late November, 1874. The immigrants consisted of laborers, weavers, dairymen, and small farmers. Many were without means to pay their passage. About two hundred and sixty-five families took passage on the **Vaderland**, the **Nederland**, and the **Abbotsford** and arrived destitute in Philadelphia on Christmas morning. No provisions had been made for them but in Hamburg their tickets had been issued through to Kansas. With C. B. Schmidt's approval they were rushed west. At Saint Louis they were already without food.

They proceeded to Florence, Newton, and Hutchinson, and took refuge from the bitter midwinter cold in empty store buildings, exhausted, many ill and discouraged, and with little provisions of any kind and with few comforts. They spent the rest of the winter in inadequate quarters, supported by relief funds, and in spring they were moved to small forty acre farms in McPherson county and to farms in Barton county near Great Bend.

The migration movement proceeded with unexpected rapidity. The immigrant groups sometimes consisting of entire churches and shiploads. At times the sudden large arrivals brought about almost insurmountable difficulties. Once even the patient and mild-mannered John F. Funk wrote in his diary:

*"Became completely disgusted and tired of such a set of nonsensical fools as we have here in the city of Elkhart. Houses—a hundred houses are said to stand idle and empty in the town and yet people rather have them stand empty than rent them. They seem to be afraid of these people. I must think our people are a very narrowminded and unfeeling people."*

At the end of 1874, the Western Board of Guardians reported in the February, 1875, edition of **Zur Heimat** that a total of 1,275 families had migrated to America. Of these 230 families had gone to Manitoba, 15 families to Minnesota, 80 families to Nebraska, 200 families to Dakota, 600 families to Kansas, and the remaining 150 families had temporarily remained with Mennonites in the eastern states, some too poor to get any farther.

Too late the Russian government tried desperately to stop the emigration tide. The Alexanderwohl congregation waited anxiously nine months for their passports. During this time the distinguished General von Todleben, as personal envoy from the Czar, came to speak to the congregation and pled with them not to emigrate. When Todleben walked out of the congregation the audience sang a hymn and many were weeping and the General too was visibly impressed. However, it appeared that not one had

changed his mind. When this was brought to the attention of Todleben, coupled with a plea for assistance in securing passports, the General, seeing the determination and sincerity of the people replied: "I shall do it." He kept his word. In a short time the Alexanderwohl congregation received their passes and embarked on the Cimbria and Teutonia.



Courtesy Mennonite Life

As one immigrant ship after another arrived in America, railroad companies as well as church agencies welcomed and assisted the immigrants. The church motivated by an unselfish desire to serve the newcomers; the railroads motivated by ulterior and pecuniary reasons; nevertheless, scarcely could one have carried on the work without the other. At one time the Santa Fe company even chartered a **Red Star** ocean steamer to bring a shipload of Mennonite household goods and farm implements. These goods were brought to Philadelphia and then by rail to the settlers and all free of charge. The ship's cargo consisted of chests, crated wagons, plows, and Russian threshing stones.\*

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\* Wm. B. Bracke in **Wheat Country** says: "With them they had brought a hundred so-called Russian threshing machines, going back almost to Biblical days. Not a one of these horse-powered devices was ever put to use in Kansas."



## CHAPTER V

### A Crimean Church Migrates

*Now they desire a better country—Hebrews*

The migration of the Krimmer group from the Crimean Peninsula to Marion County, Kansas, is unique for several reasons: Almost the entire church migrated as a unit; it was the first church body to arrive in America, and this group, more than any other, planned their villages, Gnadenau and Hoffnungsthal, their schools, and their farming operations on the Russian village pattern.

The group consisted of about thirty-five families\* and emigrated under the leadership of Elder Jacob A. Wiebe. The Russian officials greatly discouraged their leaving. As noted, the Czar sent his personal representative to persuade them to stay. General von Todleben requested that all "would-be" emigrants come to church. When he came to the great assembly he looked about and asked: "Are all these emigrants?" Then, Wiebe reports, "the General began to speak, loud and distinctly in pure German":

His majesty, Czar Alexander, has sent me to you and I am to tell you he loves you, you are worthy to dwell in his empire; why do you have in mind to emigrate? One hundred years your fathers have been in this land, you enjoy it here, you have fine schools, fine churches, fine houses and gardens, you need not work yourselves, the work is done without you, all you have to do is look after the work, you can hire Russian laborers at low wages. Why will you emigrate? When you come to America you will have to dig trees, weed the roots, and break the prairie, and do all the work yourself. Here you have it as fine as you wish.

The Crimean group had already disposed of their properties and was determined to leave. Wiebe says: "I presented a petition to the General, we thanked his majesty, the Czar, for the grants we had enjoyed in Russia and prayed for dismissal, which Todleben promised. We received our passports and could leave our loved homes, as well as friends, parents, brothers, and sisters."

The group left their village Annenfeld, near the city of Simferopol, May 30, 1874. Elder Wiebe had left May 9th, to say farewell to his mother in the Molotschna colony and to make further emigration arrangements.\*\* They traveled over Odessa to the German seaport, Hamburg, and embarked, June 15, 1874, on the Inman line steamship, **City of Brooklyn**. Before leaving the harbor, Elder Wiebe conducted a farewell service in the bow of the ship. They came to Liverpool,\*\* July 2, and after a rather stormy voyage they reached New York, July 15, 1874.

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\* The exact number has not been determined. Only three families of the Crimean group remained in Crimea. It has been estimated that from thirty-five to forty families emigrated. A total of about one hundred and fifty persons.

\*\* As reported by Jacob A. Wiebe in a letter to the Santa Fe Railway.

\*\*\* The Russian calendar was 12 days behind other calendars. Probably the time change took place from Hamburg to Liverpool and the voyage to Liverpool actually took only several days.

From New York they journeyed to Elkhart, Indiana. They knew of John F. Funk through his paper, **Herold Der Wahrheit**, and arrived at Elkhart, July 20, early on a Sunday morning, unexpected, and at a most inopportune time. Funk, who was to receive the immigrants, had gone through a most trying experience. During this fateful Saturday night, his daughter Grace Ann, who had been very ill for several days, had died. The grief stricken father, exhausted from long bed-side vigils, had to be awakened from a short sleep, early in the morning. He was told that a large group of Mennonite immigrants had arrived at the depot and they and their baggage must be provided for. Death had entered the Funk home, the immigrants had arrived unexpectedly, and it was Sunday morning. The fortitude of this man is astounding. Funk writes:

*Under the circumstances it was indeed a question as to what I could do for them. But near the church was a vacant house, quite roomy. I secured the key and opened it. After hauling the heavy baggage and the old people to the house, I called a grocer in the vicinity and asked him to open his store and sell these people bread, meat, coffee, tea, etc. They took the work into their own hands and washed, dressed, made dinner and at two o'clock had church services.*



Elder and Mrs. Jacob A. Wiebe

Under the circumstances Elder Funk invited Wiebe to preach to a mixed audience of immigrants and Elkhart people. Both groups were deeply stirred and many tears of sympathy as well as thanksgiving were shed.

For about a month the group stayed at Elkhart. Those that did not find room in the rented building put up temporarily in Funk's "Prairie Street Mennonite Church" and later found refuge in an empty factory building. The young and able bodied men were employed by Elkhart farmers and that congregation

donated food and other necessities to the poorer families. One of the Krimmer group died and was buried at Elkhart.

The immigrants tried not to impose on the Elkhart people. A few days after their arrival an Elkhart member brought firewood to the immigrant quarters to do their cooking. When Wiebe became aware of the incident he told the farmer politely but firmly that they could not accept "split firewood" and insisted that he take it back. Wiebe said their men would be happy to cut and split the wood themselves if they could have it for kindling. The farmer accepted the offer and of course was pleased with such an attitude.

From Elkhart, Wiebe accompanied by Franz R. Janzen, went west to scout out a suitable place for settlement. They looked at land in Dakota and Nebraska but decided against these states because, "we were used to a warmer climate than that of Dakota" and in Nebraska, "we were afraid of deep wells which had to be drilled and cost much money." From Nebraska they travelled into Kansas and came as far west as Great Bend where they met with the grasshopper invasion. C. B. Schmidt, the German speaking Santa Fe agent showed them his lands. For days they travelled about on wagons and carts, looking at acres and acres of virgin prairie in the Sunflower State.\*

Finally, on a very hot day in August, the three men were eating their lunch under a huge cottonwood, in Risley township, Marion county. (Now Menno township, section 13, later known as the Peter Harms farm.) After they had eaten, the dapper, but now tired, Schmidt looked at his sun blistered hands saying, "I believe I have done my part." He had no more land to show them and while he fervently hoped that they would decide for Kansas, he secretly feared that on account of the intense heat and evidences of the terrible grasshopper scourge, they might decide for Nebraska or Dakota.

Wiebe and Janzen realized that things had come to a climax. Their group was anxiously waiting at Elkhart. They had seen much good land but they had also seen the scars of plagues, droughts, and empty homesteads. However, nowhere had they liked the terrain quite as well as the gentle hills, valleys, and streams in Risley township. Undoubtedly they were influenced in their choice by the presence of a few Mennonite settlers to the north, east and west, the tentative reservation of Johannes Fast, and Christian Krehbiel's recommendation. They contracted for twelve alternate sections, 7,680 acres of Risley township Santa Fe land. Actually with the intervening sections the land complex embraced twenty-four sections. It was located about ten miles west of Marion Center and fourteen miles northwest of Peabody, the nearest point on the newly constructed Santa Fe Railroad.\*\*

After the papers had been duly executed under the large cottonwood, Schmidt, happy in the final consummation of the deal,

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\* Kansas chose the Sunflower as its floral emblem. It grew wild along the nine hundred mile long Old Santa Fe Trail. Sunflower State became the common and household name of Kansas.

\*\* Peabody was named for F. H. Peabody, one of the Santa Fe directors.



generously proposed that he would go to Elkhart and arrange for the Krimmer group to come. Schmidt had successfully made this first hurdle and was more than anxious to go East to meet other immigrants. Wiebe and Janzen were to stay at Peabody and prepare for the arrival of the settlers. Wiebe rented an empty store building, bought a stove, a table, a team of horses, a wagon, a little lumber and some food. Then, almost overwhelmed by the great responsibility he had shouldered, with fear and trembling, he awaited the arrival of the families. They came to Peabody, August 16, 1874, early on a Sunday morning and before many hours had gone by, the group was on its way to the spot which had been purchased for them.

The Mennonite settlers from the north, later Brudertal, had come with ox carts and teams to help transport the new arrivals. Wiebe says: "John Fast, Sr., who already lived here, came with a conveyance, also Wilhelm Ewert, Mrs. Peter Funk, and John Ratzlaff sent teams." American neighbors also lent a helping hand. Wiebe and his family stayed for several days at the home of John Risley, who had settled in Marion County in 1870.

Mrs. Peter Funk, whose husband had died in Kansas, June 24, 1874, took fourteen families into her recently built large barn. Some of the families put up in tents and some had a unique way of providing sleeping quarters—they turned their wagons upside down and slept under them. The same Sunday evening a long table was spread in the Funk barn and the first immigrant "Love Feast" and Thanksgiving service was held. The next day, Monday, August 17, they went about staking out the village of Gnadenuau.



This charred portion of a stump is all that remains of the huge Cottonwood on section 13, in the shade of which the twelve sections were purchased. At that time there were but few large trees in central Kansas and this Cottonwood and one at Great Bend were historic landmarks. The tree had escaped prairie fires, being located between the forks of the South Cottonwood and the Stony Brook. Whether the Cottonwood rivers received their name from this tree is not certain. About a decade ago this historic tree was demolished by a terrific bolt of lightning.

## HOW WE CAME TO AMERICA

By Jacob A. Wiebe\*

I was born August 6, 1836, in the Margenau village, Molotschna colony. When I was sixteen years old my father died and I was cared for by other people. For several years I served as coachman for the mayor of Halbstadt.\*\* I came to know many people.

After the Crimean War all Mohammedans had to leave South Russia and much land became available in Crimea. From 1853 to 1855 I served in the army provision wagon detail and therefore knew Crimea quite well. In 1861 a group was formed in the Molotschna to buy land. Our aim was to get rich quick but we did not know how to work that soil and had several years of crop failures and we became very poor and distressed. A revival came and the "winds of God" reached from Crimea to the Volga. Congregations came into being and here our brethren group had its beginning.

When our fathers migrated to Russia they were given by Emperor Paul a "Privilegium" in which special freedoms were assured for all times. In the year 1870 this document was recalled by the Czar. We asked for leniency but were told that we had to comply with universal conscription or leave the country. We sold our belongings very cheaply—some land we sold on time but the buyers did not keep their promises, but trusting in God we set out on our journey. On May 9, 1874, we left our nice home in Crimea. When we had gone four **Werst** we could still see our beautiful Acacia trees in full bloom. Finally, all we loved so much disappeared from our view. Goodbye—Goodbye, Annenfeld! We had received our passes and could leave and we arrived at New York, July 15. We had emigrated with the Czar's approbation and so faithful and obedient as we have been to Russia, so far as God's Word and our conscience allows, so we have in mind to be in America, and to seek the peace of the land.

From New York we proceeded directly to Elkhart where we were received by the friendly John F. Funk. Through his efforts all of us secured shelter and the young men were profitably employed by Elkhart farmers. Franz Janzen and I were selected to look for a place to settle. We went to Dakota, then to Nebraska, and finally to Kansas. When we had bought land—twelve sections, we let our people follow us.

We hurried to get everything ready for the winter. I rented an empty store, bought a stove, table, horses, and a wagon. While we waited for our families it was very hot, so that we have not had a greater heat since. I came into temptations on account of the high winds, everything was dry and withered. Recently grass-

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\* Excerpts from *Der Wahrheitsfreund*, Volume 1, No. 1; the Groening-Wiebe Family Genealogy, and a letter to the Santa Fe.

\*\* Young Wiebe received the position as coachman for bravery at a wolf chase. On a fast steed he came first upon a large wolf and killed the animal single handed with a club before others arrived. Later he married the mayor's daughter.



hoppers had taken all. I knew soon our people would arrive. The wind and dust swept through the street of Peabody. I suddenly became afraid of the future—whether we would make our living here. The great responsibility of having selected a place of settlement for so many people rested heavily on me. In my grief I sat down on the steps. I thought of the poor families and their children, we had no provisions, no friends in the new world, the winter was nigh at the door, we were wanting of dwellings, agricultural implements, and seed, everything was high in price, some of ours were old, weak, and sick, the future seemed very gloomy, there were also no prospects of rain, only wind, dust, and very hot,—all this fell over me. I could not help myself but let my tears flow freely.



The stone steps on which Elder Wiebe sat and wept. The building has been rebuilt but the steps are said to be those that were there in 1874.



Elder Wiebe's well worn CONTINENT brand felt hat. The inside band has the meaningful inscription —FROM OCEAN TO OCEAN.

While I was thus sitting on the threshold and weeping, Mrs. August Seabold came to me and asked: "Mr. Wiebe, what ails you?" I told her my grief. Then she began to console me. She pointed to the street saying: "Do you see those stones? They are sometimes entirely under water. It can rain very hard here, and it soon will rain. Oh, Mr. Wiebe, be of good cheer, such people as you will make their living," and so it was. It soon began to rain.

Late on Saturday night our people arrived. I took my family in my wagon and we rode from Peabody onto the land. I had loaded some lumber, utensils, and my family on top. So we rode in the deep grass to the little stake that marked the spot I had chosen. When we reached the same I stopped. My wife asked me, "Why do you stop?" I said, "We are to live here." Then she began to weep.

C. Henry Smith comments: "Prairie in every direction as far as the eye could see; not a sign of a neighborly house anywhere; no inviting roads leading to well-known places; no social herds of cattle; not a familiar sound except the shrill chirp of the cricket and the grasshopper, and the mournful whistling of the hot winds as they blew across the sun-burned prairies. Nothing but seared grass and browned prairie flowers, and a far-flung skyline in every direction. Not even a roof over her head to shelter her from the hot rays of a burning August sun, or a possible summer



shower; not even the promise of one beyond the possibilities that lay in the few sticks of wood not yet unloaded from Elder Wiebe's wagon. Was it for this that she had left her comfortable home in the village of Annenfeld, amid the green fields near Simferopol? Was it for this she had spent four weary months in travel over land and sea? No wonder Mrs. Wiebe wept; and she was not the only woman in the party who wept that day."

We built light board shanties, dug wells, and in three weeks it began to rain—there was a heavy rain. The first sown wheat brought a bountiful harvest. We had not sowed much but the little brought much and that gave us courage.

There were several very poor families among us, but we did not want to take up homesteads. We did not want to become citizens as yet. At first we put up a canvas hut and later built a barn in which nineteen of us lived. We were all poor and a number even owing their passage, as well as for their oxen, plows, wagons and everything. Some even owed for their sod houses, and all had to buy provisions for a year. Many were in debt for all this and there was no way of earning money. We needed to borrow large sums, but where? We had no friends except Bernard



Warkentin from whom we received \$1,000. When this was distributed our people needed money for oxen and cows and Consul Jansen loaned us \$1,000. Then they said we must have provisions and lumber for our houses and Elder Ewert advanced us another \$1,000. Then came the time for the first payment on our land for which Jacob Funk loaned us \$1,000.

And so we sat in our poor sod houses, some two feet in the ground, the walls of sod, the roofs of long grass that reached into the prairie. But we did not realize our danger, for we lived up to our knees in prairie grass. There were some twenty-five

families of us living on one section, all in a row like a village. A good friend near by, John Risley, informed us of the danger we were in; for he had seen prairie fires.\* He took his five pair of oxen and plowed five or six furrows around the village. Then he told us to burn the grass between the furrows. We followed his advice—thanks to the Lord!

### Fighting a Prairie Fire



Photo Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society

For a number of years prairie fires were a constant menace to the Gnadenau settlers. Prof. D. E. Harder has related that as a boy he and his younger brother accidentally set fire to the prairie near their home. The flames swept over the field, destroying their wheat crop, and at a time when his father was sorely in need of money. As a punishment and out of sheer necessity the Harder family went that year without sorghum molasses, eating their bread mostly without a spread—a punishment, no doubt, sufficiently severe.

During our life we were blessed with twelve children. Eight children died long ago; one daughter in Orloff, three sons and three daughters in Crimea, and one son here in America. Thus we came to America with many anxieties and crosses. God's presence was with us in this land and He blessed abundantly. The heavenly Father has had a watchful eye, and has looked down on us with favor.

Jacob A. Wiebe.

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\* John Risley had a little post office on his homestead on section 12, just south of the Gnadenau village site. The township and the little public school had been named for him. The mail came delivered to Risley from Peabody.

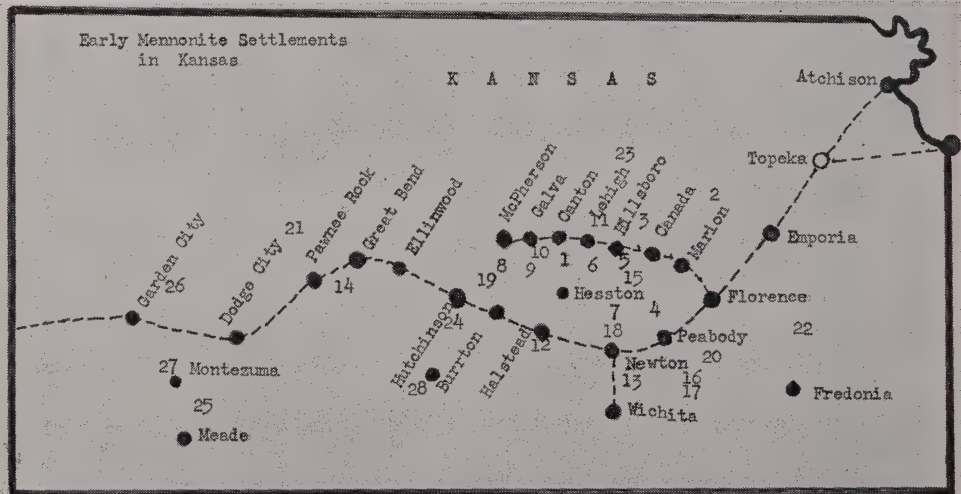
## CHAPTER VI

### The Great Mennonite Invasion

*Behold, all the land is before thee—Jeremiah*

In 1874, simultaneously with the grasshopper, the Mennonites began to invade Kansas. The grasshopper came from the northwest, the Mennonites from the east, far from beyond the Atlantic. Their respective missions were diametrically opposed to each other. The grasshopper came to destroy, the Mennonites came to create and build up. The grasshoppers accomplished their mission in short order and left Kansas never to return. The Mennonites remained and multiplied, and made Kansas the banner wheat state in the Union, just as they had made southern Russia the chief supply source of wheat for European consumption.—C. B. Schmidt.

More than half of the immigrants that came to the states settled in Kansas. It is a long step from Russia to the Sunflower state and the reasons for settling here were fivefold: (1) They were looking for agricultural opportunities and the virgin prairies looked promising. (2) They were concerned about a good water supply. Kansas had shallow wells, streams and springs. (3) They



Key to Map: 1. Spring Valley 1873, 2. Council Grove 1873, 3. Bruderthal 1873, 4. Catlin 1873, 5. Gnadenau 1874, 6. Hoffnungsthal 1874, 7. New Alexanderwohl 1874, 8. Hoffnungsau 1874, 9. Hoffnungsfeld 1874, 10. Cantoner 1875, 11. French Creek 1875, 12. Halstead 1875, 13. Gnadenberg 1875, 14. Bergthal 1875, 15. Ebenfeld 1876, 16. Emmaus 1876, 17. Swiss 1876, 18. Newton 1876, 19. Ebenezer 1877, 20. Zion 1877, 21. Gnadenenthal 1876, 22. Woodson 1877, 23. Brethren in Christ 1879 (not Mennonites), 24. Amish 1888, 25. Kleine Gemeinde 1908, 26. Garden City 1918 (the last two groups were pioneer settlements at Jansen, Nebraska, but re-located in Kansas), 27. Montezuma 1912, 28. Pretty Prairie.



preferred a mild climate. The climate in this state was similar to that of southern Russia. (4) The greatest inducement was that the Kansas Legislature in March, 1874, "**Mindful of the peaceful principles of the colonists, passed an act exempting Mennonites and friends from military duty.**"<sup>1</sup> (5) Lastly Kansas had C. B. Schmidt. This shrewd man had the exemption act and the State Constitution printed in German for distribution among prospective Mennonite settlers.

In the October 15, 1874, **Topeka, Commonwealth**, Noble L. Prentis tells of the Great Invasion:

One of the largest bonafide land sales ever made in Kansas, has just been concluded by the Santa Fe Railroad with a community of Mennonites who landed in New York during the month of September and who have spent the last thirty days and a good many rubles in our city. This land purchase amounts to about 100,000 acres of railroad land, aside from a number of improved farms. This means to Kansas an acquisition of about one million and a half of capital and an addition to her population of some two thousand souls. From the Cottonwood river to the Little Arkansas, a scope of magnificent prairie country fifty miles in length, is now one colony, composed of the thriftiest and most intelligent class of foreigners that ever landed upon our shores; and "in three years" to use the language of one of their elders, "that ocean of grass will be transformed into an ocean of waving fields of grain, just as we left our Molotschna colony." Kansas will be to America what the country of the Black Sea of Azov is now to Europe, her wheat field.

The Mennonite immigration began shortly after the return to Russia of the first delegations that had been sent on an exploring tour, about a year ago. A few single families of considerable wealth followed the advice of their delegates and selected several sections of land in the vicinity of Marion Center where they made substantial improvements at once.

The initial step was followed by the purchase of 43,000 acres of land on the part of the Mennonite community at Summerfield, Illinois. Parties of from five to forty families have since arrived from Russia, mostly from the Crimean Peninsula. The party which arrived in Topeka in the last



Courtesy Mennonite Book Concern

Stone house built by Peter Funk in the spring of 1874. This was the first home erected by the 1874 immigrants. The house is still occupied and in good liveable condition. It is located about two miles north of Canada.

thirty days, and who have now left for their future homes, numbers about two hundred and fifty families, the majority of whom have belonged to the celebrated Molotschna colony. That colony comprises sixty-five villages, and is considered the wealthiest of the German settlements of South Russia. Emigration from that place has just set in, and as fast as the people can obtain their passports from the government so fast will they leave that country for America.

Next summer will show wonderful changes in the region beyond the Cottonwood and Little Arkansas, till now almost devoid of habitation. Even now the busy hum has begun. Long lines of wagons with lumber, household goods and farm implements, are passing out from the railroad stations. The carpenters are busy putting up the first temporary shelter. The Santa Fe company is erecting five immense immigrant houses at convenient places for the reception of the newcomers.



New Alexanderwohl Immigrant Houses—1874

The mowers that have been laid up for the season are brought into requisition again to cut the waving grass for the numerous thousands of work horses, oxen, and milk cows to subsist on during the winter; carload after carload of breaking plows and other implements are sent down the road.\* The wild prairie is to be broken doubly deep in October, yet to receive a dressing of wheat and rye. No one thinks of drought and grasshoppers.

The influx continued for almost a decade. The railroads rivaled with each other for settlers. Free passes were granted, ships met at arrivals, freight carted free, and land was offered cheap and on easy terms. Soon the immigrants discovered that the companies and agents were fiercely vying with one another. One reports:<sup>2</sup>

We were met by several representatives of different roads, of whom I remember C. B. Schmidt of the Santa Fe and Peter Jansen of the Burlington and Quincy Railroad. We were quartered in a large building on the fair grounds outside of the city (Lincoln). First, of course, the land of the B. and Q. was inspected under the guidance of Mr. Touzalin and Peter Jansen. Having promised Schmidt that no decision would be made until the Santa Fe had had a chance to show us what they had, the committee also went to Kansas. When the committee returned, it became apparent that the inclination was toward Kansas and Touzalin wanted to know why.

One reason was that the Kansas lands were covered with fine grass, and we would be able to make hay for the winter. Touzalin promptly replied that the B. & Q. would furnish all hay free for the winter.

Another point was fine water at small depth. Touzalin said the B. & Q. would either drill a well and put a pump on every quarter section or make a well and put up a windmill on every section.

The third objection was a sandy stretch of land between where we were to be located and the towns. Touzalin replied that they would build a plank road over the sandy stretches.

\* For a number of years more plows and other implements were sold at Newton than any other place in the United States. The "Casidy" plow, a two-wheeled heavy tongued plow, became a special favorite with the immigrants.

Touzalin had switched from the Santa Fe to the Burlington and was now determined to win the contingent for Nebraska. He offered: temporary living quarters; to haul free a train load of freight from Philadelphia (crated wagons); to haul free lumber, coal, and grain, and to give railroad passes to committees. To all this Schmidt, who was standing among the spectators replied that he would do the same.

Finally came the most important question—the price of the land. Touzalin made one offer after another—each to be met by Schmidt. Touzalin was determined not to leave one stone unturned and finally said: **“The C. B. & Q. will give you the necessary land for nothing.”** This Schmidt did not meet saying later that he already saw that they would come to **Kansas** and he wanted to save that much for his company although he had been instructed: **“You bring those Mennonites at any cost.”**

Such incidents indicate the intense rivalry for settlers. Touzalin had found himself out of harmony with the Santa Fe company and had gone over to the Burlington line. A. S. Johnson was now colonization director for the Santa Fe and he had put Schmidt to work “capturing Mennonites.” This rivalry in the end worked to the good of the newcomers. Many concessions and special favors were granted that otherwise would not have been made.

The immigrants settled in the counties of Marion, Harvey, McPherson, Reno, Butler, and Barton. At first the settlements were strung out near to the frontier towns of Marion Center, Florence, Peabody, Newton, Halstead, Hutchinson, and Great Bend and the land was purchased at two to seven dollars per acre. Before settling, the groups carefully searched for suitable locations. One observer states: “Later harvests have borne out that the Mennonites were almost uncanny at judging the land.” One investigating committee consisted of thirteen men: Ediger, Balzer, Gaeddert, Wedel, Richert, Ewert, Stucky, Rediger, Siemens, Neufeld, Wahl, Penner, and Schultz. Ediger reports:

September 9 (1874) I was one of the men selected to look up a suitable location. Remained in Florence all night.

September 10. Balzer and Gaeddert left for Pibude (Peabody). Stayed all night in Ewert's stable. His house is not yet completed. When finished it will be 28x16 and will cost \$250.

September 11. Left to investigate land. Out until late at night. Did not meet a single farmer, nor a single person, nor even a single bird until about dark when we met a farmer named Holdeman. Remained with him all night.

September 12. Rained all night. Haven't met any good land. Too hilly. Arrived at Nuden (Newton) at 4. Had dinner at 40 cents each.

September 14. Balzer and Richert went to Elmwood (Ellinwood). I went to Great Bend, 10 miles farther. Ohm Stucky went with a farmer to the other side of town.

September 15. Crossed the Arkansas, but did not like it. Too hilly. Grass short and too many weeds. Soil poor.

September 16. Balzer found good land at Hutchinson. We reached Halstead at five and found nice even land.

September 17. Arrived at Topeka in the afternoon. Held a council about finding a location.

September 18. Left Topeka for Council Grove. Drove out and stayed all night. Well pleased with the land but afraid of water. Rempel dug a well 63 feet deep, but no water.



September 23. Left Marion Center. Land agents took us around. Siemens did not wish to buy land here. Returned to Topeka.

September 26. Went to market in Topeka and bought a cow for \$14.

September 27. Sunday. Ohm Balzer held service. In the afternoon went pleasure walking about town.

September 28. Bought a team and harness and wagon for \$225.

September 29. Arrived at Hutchinson three at night. Unloaded cattle and other things. No damage.

October 1. Looked at land with Gaeddert. Found nothing good.

October 2. Selected land in McPherson county. Others bought also.

October 6. Loaded up for "Heimreise." Paid \$200 for two yoke oxen, 300 pounds wheat, 200 pounds rye flour, 15 bushels potatoes. Started for home.

Fortunately Kansas had an unusually late winter in 1874. One writer reports: "Mother nature made slight amends for the drought and grasshopper plague by contributing a second spring and lilacs were in bloom in October."

In February, 1875, Santa Fe agent, C. B. Schmidt, "armed with more than one hundred letters from Mennonites in Kansas, made a trip to Russia, going from village to village, reporting the success of those already gone, and soliciting others to follow. Russia tried to stop the movement, promising supplemental service—sanitary, hospital, forestry, engineering—to those who did not wish to bear arms."<sup>3</sup> Schmidt soon found that his activities in Russia were not appreciated by that government and had to leave secretly and hastily but thousands continued to emigrate.

The competition between the states became intense and claims and counter claims were hurled back and forth. Each state had its boosters. Cornelius Jansen, after his expulsion from Russia, had first gone to Canada and then temporarily to Iowa but in 1874 purchased 20,000 acres in Jefferson county, Nebraska. Jansen wrote:

*"Without doubt, Nebraska, is the best agricultural state west of the Missouri, both because of its geographical location and direct railroad connections. Such as do not care for Nebraska can find other northern states open to prospective immigrants, so that it is not necessary to go to the hot drought ridden southwest Kansas."*<sup>4</sup>



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Land Commissioner

C. B. Schmidt  
German Agent

Topeka, Kansas

One Kansan reported that most of the Henderson community had drowned out. To this Elder Peters replied that only one settler who had built near a creek had difficulty with high water. He said:

*"There is too much 'Agenterei' in the whole land business. Those who like a warm climate can choose Kansas; those who like it cold can go to Minnesota, while those desiring a modern climate will come to Nebraska."*<sup>5</sup>

The Kansas people felt that wheat could not survive the fierce Nebraska and Dakota winters while those living farther north warned against the scorching summer winds of Kansas. However, each state continued to receive more immigrants and the population of the midwest states increased rapidly. In 1886, Governor Martin of Kansas said: "The growth of Kansas has had no parallel. The great states of New York and Pennsylvania were nearly one hundred and fifty years in attaining a population Kansas has reached in thirty years."<sup>6</sup> No doubt part of this phenomenal growth was due to Mennonite immigrations.

In May 1875, fourteen families arrived from Poland, led by Elder Benjamin Unruh, and settled along the French Creek, a small stream a few miles north of the Gnadenau settlement. In June a contingent arrived from the Volga and about twelve families went to the Gnadenau settlement. In July the **Nederland** landed with five hundred and fifty Mennonites on board, many locating in Kansas. On August 4, the **State of Nevada** docked with five hundred and seventy immigrants. Abraham Harms, Peter Harms,



Courtesy M. B. Publishing House

Mud or adobe home of Abraham Harms built in 1875. No longer in existence. The house and stables were under the same roof.

and Frank Toews were the leaders. Sixty-five families, including the Harms families, went to Kansas. Peter Harms settled on the tract where the Gnadenau land purchase had been consummated. Abraham Harms, a minister and school teacher, settled in the Alexanderfeld village, about two miles west of Gnadenau.



In January 1876, the **City of Montreal** arrived with two hundred immigrants from the Volga region. About half, led by Peter Eckert, settled near the Gnadenau village with Eckert locating in the village. The other half, led by A. Hahnhart, settled near Pawnee Rock, Kansas. In early July a group arrived at Gnadenau from the Molotschna and twenty-one families came from Prussia on the **Rhine**—some going to Iowa and some to Kansas. Another shipload of five hundred and forty-one immigrants came on the **Vaderland**, arriving at Philadelphia, July 27, most of them locating in Kansas.

Among the arrivals from the Molotschna were two brothers and three brothers-in-law of the founder of Gnadenau and Hoffnungsthal. They came to Kansas July 11, and Heinrich Wiebe, a minister, settled on a one mile long forty acre strip at the farthest east end of the Hoffnungsthal village with Peter P. Loewen next to him. Dietrich Wiebe, a farmer and blacksmith settled on a narrow tract at the farthest west end of Hoffnungsthal with next to him Abraham Klassen and then Abraham Regehr. All the tracts in the Gnadenau, Hoffnungsthal, and Alexanderfeld villages were now occupied. These arrivals were poor and their dwelling houses were made of mud. Since many had left the villages in Russia,



Mud house built by Peter P. Loewen in 1877, in Hoffnungstal. The only pioneer house still in existence. It was built out of a mixture of mud, grass, and water, kneaded by horses driven round and round. The walls are sixteen inches thick and it has eight pane glass windows. It is 24 feet wide and 40 feet long but originally the stable was attached at one end. This historical building has recently been moved to the Hillsboro Memorial Park.

those that emigrated later had to sell at ruinously low prices because the markets were glutted with land, livestock, and implements. Besides the exchange rate of the Russian ruble had dropped from seventy-five cents to thirty-seven cents.



There were far less arrivals in 1877, but in 1878, a large contingent of one-hundred and six families arrived at New York, July 1, on the steamer **Strassburg**. Of these, thirty-four families went to Nebraska, twenty-nine to Minnesota, eight to Dakota, and thirty-five families to Kansas. The last large group arrived in June, 1879, on the **Switzerland**. Of this contingent sixty-four families settled in Nebraska, fourteen in Minnesota, seven in Dakota, and forty-two in Kansas.

After 1879 there were only scattered arrivals and in 1880 the immigration practically ended. One more group of twenty-five families came in 1884 from Turkestan, Asia. They had been led to Asia by radical leaders to escape impending tribulations. Sobered and nearly destitute they came to America, some locating at Beatrice, Nebraska and some at Newton, Kansas.

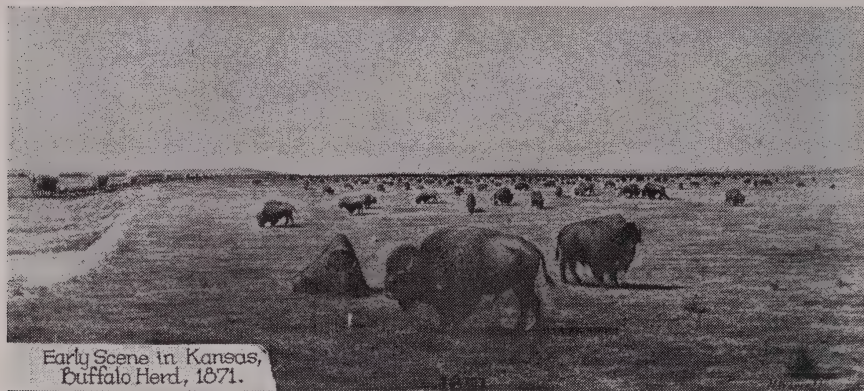
In 1877 the Kansas historian, Prentiss, estimated that 6,000 Mennonites had settled in the Arkansas valley. By the close of 1879 the Santa Fe had disposed of 1,000,000 acres of railroad grant land. By 1880 the immigrants owned farms ranging from sixty to three hundred acres and by 1883 nearly fifteen thousand Mennonites owned farms purchased from the Santa Fe.<sup>7</sup> In 1889, A. S. Johnson, the Santa Fe Colonization Director, was awarded a silver service and retired. The Santa Fe had no more land to sell. In less than twenty years an empire had been disposed of.<sup>8</sup>

The settlers' supplies came along the Santa Fe line and from the frontier towns they were hauled with oxen and horses to the settlements. Soon other railroads were built traversing the colonies. One was the Missouri Pacific line passing through the Moundridge region and another the railroad passing near the Amish settlements south of Hutchinson. In 1879, the Florence to McPherson branch of the Santa Fe was constructed, passing along the north edge of Gnadenau. On June 24, 1879, the town of Hillsboro was established, named for John G. Hill, who had homesteaded near the Gnadenau village site in 1871. In 1881 Hillsboro already had three hundred inhabitants.

One historian reports that "for ten years the influx continued, until no less than 15,000 had settled in Kansas. Later the number of Mennonites reached 60,000."<sup>9</sup> A recent study found that, "Approximately 25,000 Mennonites today live on farms which lie within a radius of forty-five miles of Newton. Sixty of the ninety-nine Mennonite churches of the state are within this circle."<sup>10</sup>

## The Great Transformation

From Buffalo Ranges



To Prosperous Farms and Villages



## MENNONITE MIGRATIONS TO DAKOTA

The first settlements were made in the counties of Turner and Hutchinson in a region thirty miles north of Yankton and in between the James and Vermillion rivers. Daniel Unruh, with a small group located here in the summer of 1873. Unruh's group remained in Yankton for the winter and in spring moved on the land. On May 27, 1874, Andreas Schrag, the Swiss deputy of the year before, arrived with ten families from Volhynia, Poland, and started a Swiss settlement. Soon a second group came and in July a third group led by Christian Schrag, Christian Kaufman, and Peter Kaufman. A segment of the Tobias Unruh congregation from Ostrog, Poland, came in 1875 and formed a settlement nearby. Several families from the Molotschna joined one or the other settlement already established.

Of the Hutterites that came from Europe it is estimated that about half settled on individual farms and joined Mennonite settlements. About ten miles west of Marion a Mennonite Brethren congregation was organized in 1878 with Heinrich Adrian as leader and the Krimmer Brethren organized a church at Bridgewater in 1886. The earliest settlements were made where today the towns of Marion, Freeman, Menno, and Bridgewater are located. In each settlement churches were organized. Most of these joined the General Conference of Mennonites.

The Dakota settlers had to undergo one catastrophe after another; fierce blizzards, prairie fires, grasshopper plagues, and droughts. In spite of hardships and poverty the settlements became prosperous communities and have expanded to adjacent counties and to other states. Freeman, with its college, hospital, and home for the aged has remained the center of the South Dakota Mennonites.

In 1874, thirty-five families of Hutterites established the **Wolf Creek** and **Bon Homme** Bruderhofs. In 1877, seventeen families arrived and formed the **Elm Spring** Bruderhof. The Hutterites were followers of Jacob Hutter, who believed in a scriptural basis for a communal way of life. Although organically not directly connected with the Mennonites the Hutterites were firm nonresistants. A Bruderhof is a religious and social unit of about twenty families who make up a communal group, have their property in common, eat at a common table, and abide by strict regulations in work, conduct, and dress. In 1879 the last Hutterite contingent arrived. Before World War I, these "Brotherhoods" had expanded to seventeen settlements. It is strange that in a land where religious freedom is basic, these people had to undergo intolerance and persecution. During the war some of their young men were imprisoned, subjected to cruel treatment, and several died in prison for their faith. To escape the wave of intolerance, twelve Bruderhofs emigrated to Canada during World War I. Financially the brotherhood units have prospered but as a result of their isolated way of life they have suffered in educational and social standards.



## THE MINNESOTA SETTLEMENTS

The nucleus of the Minnesota settlements was a group consisting of thirteen families led by David Schroeder. They came from Crimea and had first settled at Yankton, but a Minnesota state official convinced them to change to Windom, Minnesota. They arrived in the Mountain Lake region in October, 1873. They had also investigated Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, and Iowa but felt that Kansas was too hot and dry, Dakota lacked good water, and in Nebraska the wells would be too costly. Minnesota appealed to them because the people looked healthy and happy and the scenery, especially of the Mountain Lake region, looked very beautiful.

Additional families joined the early settlers in 1874 and in 1875, and about half of the ninety-five families that came on the liners, the **Nederlands** and the **State of Nevada**, joined the colonies. In 1877 fifty more families came. In 1878 the steamer **Strassburg** brought twenty-nine families and in 1879 the liner **Switzerland** brought fourteen families. Immigrations continued until 1880 and totaled about two hundred and twenty-five families.

The immigrants came from sixty different communities and with widely different opinions and church practices.<sup>11</sup> In 1876 the first Mennonite church was organized in the Mountain Lake community with Aron Wall as Elder. In the Bingham Lake region some Mennonite Brethren had settled and on July 15, 1877, a congregation was formed with Heinrich Voth as Elder. In 1878, the Butterfield Bergthal Mennonite church was established with Gerhard Neufeld as Elder. This congregation included a number of Bergthal immigrants who had first settled in Canada but soon changed to Minnesota. In 1888 the Bruderthal church (later the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren) was established with Aron Wall as Elder. In 1889 the Bethel Mennonite church was formed with forty-seven members and H. H. Regier as Elder. During the years 1880 to 1884 about fifty families came from Galicia and joined the Butterfield settlement.

Since the settlers came from different regions, many adjustments had to be made, but the communities expanded, churches were organized and schools built. Land prices rose rapidly and farms became scarce and one group migrated to Alberta and another to Montana but the Mountain Lake, Bingham Lake, and Butterfield communities have remained strong Mennonite centers. Able leaders have come from these communities. In 1905 the Bethel Hospital and Home was established and in 1921 the Mountain Lake Home for the Aged was begun. The original settlements have expanded to nine Mennonite churches with a total membership of about three thousand.

## THE NEBRASKA MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS

Many immigrants believed that Nebraska offered the best opportunities. The climate would not be too hot nor too cold and geographically it was favorably located with railways and markets. The first settlers came, encouraged by the Burlington railroad. In 1874, Cornelius Jansen, with Kleine Gemeinde leaders purchased 20,000 acres from the Burlington company, and sixty-eight families, practically all Kleine Gemeinde adherents, settled in Jefferson county. Thirty of these families had first gone to Manitoba but soon joined the Nebraska settlement where the climate was warmer. A church was established with Abraham Friesen as leader. In 1877 more families joined the colony and the center became known as "Russian Lane." When in 1887 a railroad was built, the center was called **Jansen**, in honor of Cornelius Jansen. The town was on Peter Jansen's land and he wrote into the deeds that no saloon could be established on the land, however, the liquor interests discovered that one lot in town had been deeded without the "liquor prohibitive" clause and soon a liquor store was in operation.\*

A second colony was founded in October 1874. When the **Cimbria** contingent came to Lincoln, nearly all of the group decided for Kansas but some families, led by Elder Heinrich Epp, stayed in Nebraska and formed the Sutton community. In 1875, Elder Isaac Peters settled in this region and founded the Peters congregation. In 1877 thirty members organized a Mennonite Brethren congregation with Peter Regier as leader. In the heart of this settlement, in 1878, the town of **Henderson** was established and it has developed into a prosperous community.

A third settlement was founded in Gage county in 1877. Led by Elder Johannes Andreas, a group came from Prussia in 1876. The group stayed in winter with the Mennonite congregation at Mount Pleasant, Iowa and during the winter, Elder Andreas died.\*\* In spring some families went to Newton, Kansas and thirty-four families, guided by Cornelius Jansen, founded a settlement at Beatrice. Elder Gerhard Penner served here as leader of several congregations. In 1911 the Mennonite Deaconess Home and Hospital was established at Beatrice.

The colonies flourished and grew into well-established communities with churches, schools and hospitals. Later the Jansen region had losses. In 1901 Jansen had six churches: Kleine Gemeinde; Peters church organized in 1879; Krimmer church organized in 1880; General Conference; Mennonite Brethren, and Reformed Mennonite. Almost the entire Kleine Gemeinde group moved to Meade, Kansas in 1906-1908 and in 1918 nearly the entire Krimmer group changed to Garden City, Kansas. The Henderson and Beatrice communities have remained strong Mennonite centers and all three settlements have spread to other districts.

\* In 1953 Jansen is reported to have had five places where alcoholic beverages were sold.

\*\* Elder Andreas said: He like Moses would be able to view the promised land from afar but would not be able to enter it.



### Chapter VI References

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## CHAPTER VII

### A Tragic Immigration Interlude

*They might have had opportunity to have returned—Hebrews*

The influx of thousands of settlers created many problems. Especially was this true during the last few months of 1874. It was getting late in fall and necessary to act quickly. The Santa Fe company had hurriedly erected large "immigrant sheds" at various places. Each day new needs developed which had to be met by the railroad officials and the church representatives. The newspapers reported that long lines of wagons, loaded with lumber, household goods, and farm equipment left railroad stations, such as Peabody, Newton, and Halstead, every morning, headed for the various settlements north. From Topeka, car load after car load of breaking plows, wagons, farm equipment, food, feed, and seed, were rushed along the Santa Fe to the settler towns. Everybody was planning and working.

The **Marion County Record** in 1874 reports: August 15, "About thirty families have just arrived and are settling six miles west of Marion Center"; September 5, "Sixty families of Russians landed in Marion Center last Thursday night. Several hundred more are on the way"; September 12, "The firm of Case and Billings are kept busy locating Russians. They are coming into the country by the hundred. The phrase 'The Dutch have taken Holland,' will soon be changed to 'The Dutch have taken Marion County.' **Let 'em take**"; October 10, "Still the immigrants come." Another report says, "Everybody is happy and energetic, and hope and energy will find their reward."

Yet, this year of unparalleled home-finding activities was destined to end with a tragic note. Tobias Unruh, the Polish deputy of the year before, started out for America with a group of about two hundred and sixty families late in the fall of 1874. These people had been forced to sell their homes and many were reduced to actual poverty. They had lived on Crown land, to which they had only a limited title. When it became known that they were considering emigrating, they were evicted from their small farms. They appealed for help to America and records show that the Board of Guardians paid passage money for seventy-five families. They set out on their journey when the mid-winter storms had already set in and one of their ships, the Abbotsford, collided with a freighter. After that smallpox broke out on the boat. Their arrival in the states was unexpected and no provisions had been made for them. Since their tickets in Hamburg had been bought through to Kansas, all except fifty families were sent to their western destination and dumped on the plains of Kansas.

One hundred families with many children, (Mrs. Christian Krehbiel sets the number at seven hundred souls) came to Florence just before the New Year on a day that registered twelve de-

degrees below zero with only an empty store building for shelter. Eleven of the number were sick and many had swollen hands and feet as a result of the exposure to which they had been subjected. Bernhard Warkentin was notified of their arrival and when he hurried there he immediately sent a telegram to Summerfield **"One hundred families without food; send money and men to help."**

Immediately food, nineteen stoves, and other provisions were purchased to supply their most pressing needs. A few weeks after their arrival Elder Christian Krehbiel came to Florence and reports:

"Based on reports I had heard, I pictured the situation of these unfortunate as being frightful enough; but what I found was ten times as bad as what I imagined. The only indoor quarters of this multitude of about 100 families was a store of about 80 by 30. It was a veritable pest hole.

### A Pioneer Kansas Store Building



One hundred families took refuge in a 30 by 80 foot Florence store building. A second group was quartered at Newton and a third at Hutchinson.

The doors and the windows in the gables were kept closed, the center aisle was crowded with persons of all ages. Standing about, on either side of the aisle lay sick and exhausted men, women, and children on straw sacks midst cooking and eating utensils. No fresh air! For like most Europeans, they thought fresh air harmful. You can picture the conditions in this drafty hall, packed with human, pest-laden air charged with coal gas, meager food, little soap and water, no facilities for bodily cleanliness, no privacy—a terrible scene. It was fortunate that lack of space inside made it necessary that cooking and washing had to be done out of doors at the back of the store. It was believed that serving their spiritual hunger would give them courage, and accordingly we held a church service, at which I preached. We could not expect these people in their wretchedness to sing, so several preachers who were there led the singing, a gift I lack. The singing drew all who could get in, and attracted a group of Americans as on-lookers. While preaching my lungs became filled with noxious gases so that I opened a door. Someone immediately shut it. I stopped, opened the door again, saying, "We must have fresh air if I am to speak and you are not all to perish in this foul haze." One of the invalids lifted himself from his straw pallet and called, "Thank you, dear brother, for once I get some fresh air," but even so the fresh air did not reach the middle of the room."



## Hillcrest Cemetery, Florence, Kansas



In this cemetery many of the immigrants, who had their temporary quarters in Florence, lie buried. Not a single grave is marked, but the spot is still known as "Russian Corner." Mr. Sol Sager, a former Santa Fe employee and later for fourteen years caretaker of the cemetery, states that at one time as many as twelve were buried in a single day.

In the spring of 1875 these destitute immigrants from Ostrog, Poland were located on small forty acre farms in Canton township in McPherson County. The settlement became known as the **Cantoners**. The entire group was settled on eight sections of land. They had only ten wagons, seventeen breaking plows, and often one yoke of oxen had to be shared by several families as well as two families sharing one milk cow. Hardships and illness had broken down the stamina of this group and they lacked both financial means and initiative. John F. Funk visited the settlement and in a letter to Amos Herr, of the Pennsylvania Aid Committee, he says:

"They occupy eight sections, and live on forty acre farms. Ten are widows, and all of them poor. They have neither chair, bedsteads, nor floors. They are without stoves and have no fuel; and are insufficiently dressed. It was a cold, cloudy, dreary day, and it was very windy; I can tell you it was a hard sight to see them, even the women and children walking about in their low slippers without stockings, and the children with hands and face purple on account of the cold blasts. Many of the children were lying or sitting on their beds of pallets made of a straw sack laid on the floorless earth in the huts, and covered themselves with featherbeds to keep comfortable, as there was neither stove nor fire. We stopped at one house in which there were six families, including two widows. One family sat in a corner just eating their breakfast which consisted of a dish of potato soup cooked with dry prairie grass, corn stalks, and weeds and roots gathered on the prairie. The house was 16x20 feet as near as we could judge, made of rough boards. The roof was done of the same material, and the boards on the sides, not having been seasoned, dried and shrank considerably after having been nailed on, so that there were large openings between, through which the wind blew strong and fierce. Our hearts bled for the poor women and children who would have to spend the stormy days of the coming winter in these open shells."



Besides the concessions the railroad companies made, the churches collected \$150,000 for immigrants. The Board of Guardians spent \$10,000 on the Cantoner settlement. For a number of years this colony required financial help and other assistance. Elder Tobias Unruh soon moved to Dakota where a number of his group had settled. This left the Canton group without a leader but other churches supplied services and assisted in school work. Several mission-minded immigrant teachers volunteered to teach without pay.\* Later John Holdeman gathered most of the settlers into the Church of God in Christ. About thirty-seven families of Unruh's group had located at Great Bend, and eventually these as well as the Canton settlement became well to do.

Fortunately not all the Mennonite immigrants were poor. None were wealthy but those with more means were willing to share in the misfortune of others. A few of the immigrants brought as much as \$50,000 to America with them. Of one contingent the **Standard History of Kansas for Kansans** reports: "Four hundred families or nineteen hundred people brought with them \$2,000,000 in gold with which to found homes."

Nevertheless, each family and each immigrant venture had its difficulties, trials and anxieties. Children were born on railway trains, on board ships, in immigrant sheds, and in crude settler shanties. Comforts were few, epidemics frequent, and child mortality was high. Diseases, such as scarlet fever, smallpox, diphtheria, typhoid and typhus fever were a constant threat and often made deep inroads into the ranks of the immigrants. While the immigrants were quartered at Florence, Kansas a cholera epidemic broke out and many were carried to the grave.

Diseases and death came unbidden and many heartaches and pains were encountered. Not all that started hopefully across the Atlantic reached their destination. An 1874 Alexanderwohl immigrant made the following heart-rending entries in his diary:

"September 3: Because of lack of money, we had to stay over one day in Castle Garden. (New York harbor). In the evening, little Helena was very sick. Died in the hospital at 10 o'clock.

September 4: Wrote a number of letters home. Made the last exchange of money. Little Agatha very sick. Died at 5 o'clock. Both children left in Castle Garden.—Pastor Neuman will bury both free of charge. At 5 o'clock packed up everything. At 6 o'clock entered the little boat for shore. In the evening went over to the railroad station, and in the morning we were away from the little ones, God knows how far."

And if my heart and flesh are weak  
To bear the untried pain,  
The bruised reed he will not break  
But strengthen and sustain.

—Whittier.

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\* Heinrich Dalke taught without pay. Later the Canton church agreed to furnish a man to take Dalke's place at home to make bricks. Dalke says: "The enrollment rose up to over 150 pupils. On account of poverty some of these children came to school in bad weather without socks in their wooden slippers. I asked no compensation for the work; but they had given me the board. I must say these were among my happiest days.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A Voyage Report

*"Some thro' the water, Some thro' the flood"*

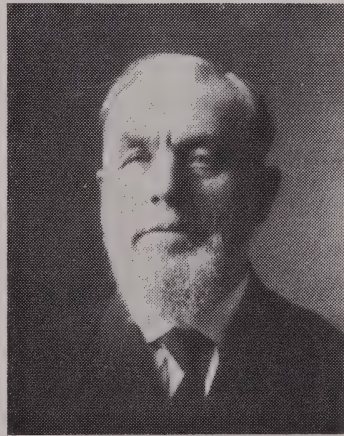
"I want to record a few experiences, of the way God has led us to America. Of my father, Jacob Wiebe, I remember very little. I recall a trip to the big city of "Berjansk." The houses seemed so big and the waves of the sea so enormous, that I was afraid, but father took me by the hand, and in his loving fatherly care, I felt greatly comforted. That night he let me sleep in his arms, and I felt so safe and secure that I have never forgotten this incident.

"At the age of seven I began to go to the Margenau village school, where Cornelius Wedel, was the teacher. I enjoyed school

#### Teacher and Pupil



Rev. Cor. P. Wedel  
1836—1900



Rev. Peter A. Wiebe  
1847—1925

and attended until age thirteen. I want to relate an experience which made a very deep impression on my life. Together with my mother we went to visit my father's sister. Not far from her home was the "Judschalee" river and some of us boys went bathing. I was swept away by the current and would have drowned, if there had been no one to rescue me. On the other side of the river a group of men were making bricks. One of the men, a good swimmer, saw me go down. He jumped into the river and saved me. If God had not been so merciful I would have drowned, and the world would have forgotten about me a long time ago.

"After the age of thirteen I worked diligently on the farm. I did such work as herd sheep, mow with a scythe, thresh with a

flail, cover roofs with straw, make bricks, and sow by hand large tracts of land. When I was eighteen I could match myself with other good scythe men and could cut three acres a day.



"In 1865 I became a furniture and wagonmaker apprentice. In 1870 I married Sara Voth of Alexanderwohl. Everything went along well. I worked at my trade as was customary from six in the morning to nine at night. We saved our money and soon we could buy a nice home and a forty-acre farm for 1300 rubles.

"In 1871 the news reached us that all would be called for military training. This came like lightning out of a clear sky. I rather wanted to be killed than kill. Petitions and deputations were sent to St. Petersburg but of no avail. One high official asked Elder Leonard Suderman: "What would you do if your enemy came to fight you?" Suderman replied: "I would go and meet him, embrace him, and ask his forgiveness, but I would not kill him."

"We prayed to God for guidance and he opened a way—to migrate to America. We sold our possessions at a great sacrifice—half price and less. Finally we received our passes and on July 22, 1874, we left Margenau after a touching farewell from our dear mother. From the hill we saw for the last time the beloved home, the school, the church. Farewell—this is the last time—Farewell—Farewell. There was much weeping, but we were happy that God had opened a way and we prayed: "Lead us into a land where we can serve Thee according to our faith, and we will serve Thee faithfully all our lives."\*

"July 22. At the railroad station we boarded the train and again many tear-stained cheeks were patted for the last time. During the next days we found ourselves on the train headed west.

"July 25. A son was born to Rev. and Mrs. Jacob Klassen. An entire railroad car was made available to them for their private use. All went well.

"July 27. The train is extremely crowded and we have been traveling for five days and everyone is tired. Everywhere passengers are sleeping on the floor and the conductor has great diffi-

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\* Another immigrant of the same contingent wrote in his diary: "Never before had we seen a more sad seven days than when we left Russia."



culty getting through the cars. In the evening we came to the Russian border. What will happen to our aged fathers and mothers? our cripples? our blind? our insane? — All were passed and we entered Prussia through a large iron gate.



Gateway out of Russia—to Freedom

"Now we had to advance our time twelve days to correspond to the Prussian calendar. Instead of July 27, it was now Sunday, August 9. We came through that part of Germany, Marienburg, where our parents and grandparents had lived. How we would have liked to stop and visit the places mother had told us so much of. Soon we came to the great and beautiful city, Berlin. We had traveled one week without being in bed or eating a warm meal.

"August 10. We arrived at the coast city, Hamburg. We were about one thousand emigrants and here we should pay forty dollars each for ocean passage and our money should be exchanged. We were quartered in a three story house and we could lie on the floors but we had no beds. In the night I thought I dreamt that we were on the ocean and I heard waves—and to our surprise—in the morning our lodging place was completely surrounded by water and boats were moving up and down. The tide had come in while we slept.

"We received orders that no one should leave our lodging place before having our money exchanged. To our consternation we were told that the money "Kurse" (exchange rate) had dropped sharply. I began to be skeptical. Before we left Russia my uncle said: "Peter! On the trip and in America you will meet many crooks—Trau, Schau, Wem!" (Trust, Look, Whom) I had an address in my pocket of an honest exchange office in Hamburg. Several of us slipped out and found the place, and to our joy they gave us \$74 for each hundred rubles which was considerably more than at our lodging house exchange. When we came back we received the bad news that we would have to wait five more days.

"August 14. Here in Hamburg David Penner's Maria died. She was buried today, close to the Hamburg Zoological Garden. A rumor is spreading that we will get a very poor ship for our ocean voyage and our hearts are filled with anxiety.

"August 16. We were to board the ship "Teutonia" but it was far from the coast. A beautiful steamship took us to the ocean liner. We said, Goodbye to Europe—never to return. When we came to the Teutonia and to our quarters we were terribly disappointed. Instead of beds—only board boxes and everything covered with coal dust. We looked and shuddered. How could we put our bedding in such filth? One had a happy thought. He took off his boots and with the foot wrappings he wiped the dust into a corner. Our mother and her two grown daughters, had the lower berth or box, and my wife and I with our two children had the upper box.

"Our quarters were worse than we had imagined and we wondered how we should stand living in them for more than two weeks. After a while we arranged things as best we could. Nearby were Groenings, Wedels, Goertzes, Pankratzes, Ratzlaffs, and Lohrenzes. I went on deck to take one last look toward Europe and found that we were 1,200 persons on board. The ocean was getting rough, and the ship rose and fell with the waves. I saw my friend R—, cling frantically to the ship's railing, his mouth wide open, emptying his stomach in streams. When I saw his green face and eyes full of tears, I too began to feel strange. I hurried down to my family and heard and saw that many were already seasick.

"August 17. What a night! My dear wife and poor little Henry and Anna seasick. The wind is blowing strong from the west. We are sailing around Scotland and Ireland.

"August 20. At last the ocean is calmer. Everyone was ordered on deck for two hours and our quarters were cleaned and fumigated. Many were so weak that they found it difficult to walk up deck.

"August 21. Windy. The attitude of the passengers is one of discouragement. The food is poor and many do not care to eat. One passenger showed the captain a piece of meat. It was horse flesh and ill smelling. We had a most terrific scare today. Fire broke out below. All passengers were ordered on deck. The ships crew worked desperately and after several hours we could again go down to our cabins. Many cried, out of the depths of their heart, to God.\*

"August 23. This is Sunday and we had morning, afternoon, and evening services. During the week days we have evening services only.

"August 26. Strong north wind. All were ordered on deck and the ship was cleaned and fumigated for the second time. I suffered from a most severe headache—worse than I have ever had, and it seemed I was close to death. Friend Ratzlaff rubbed my temples briskly with vinegar and it helped.

"August 30. Sunday. Again we had services. The food smells and tastes like sea water. Each family has a ship number and can come to the kitchen for some food, three times a day. It does not taste well—except the pudding. We were very happy for the toasted rye bread we took with us. Seasickness makes one weak and listless.

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\* On the next trip across the Atlantic the Teutonia sank. The Mennonite immigrants were the last to cross the ocean on it in safety.

"August 31. What a change. The weather is pleasant and the ocean is almost as smooth as a mirror. Other ships are in sight and we can see many large fish around our ship, probably because our excess food is thrown into the ocean. The ship's crew is now cleaning and polishing the ship because it is to be sold in New York.

"September 1. It is very foggy and every ten minutes the fog horn blasts noisily. A Jew told me that his clothes seemed unbearably itchy. He inspected his underwear and found it teeming with lice. He had a sure remedy. He threw his underwear with the bugs into the ocean.

"2 P. M. God be praised! A Coast Pilot came on board to guide us safely into the harbor. We have been at sea more than two weeks.

"September 2. At dawn we could see a dark line to our right. Soon forests, lighthouses, and huge houses appeared. O, we could have shouted for joy. At 1:30 p. m. our "**Teutonia**" quietly slid into the harbor of New York. We landed at Hoboken, Castle Garden,



A replica of the New York harbor **STATUE OF LIBERTY**. Placed in the Hillsboro (Kansas) Park by local organization in honor of Religious Freedom and the vision and sacrifices of the pioneers.

at 6 p. m. I had been seasick ten days, my wife the entire voyage, our two children had suffered greatly and also our mother and many others likewise. We had lost much weight. Our clothes were much too big and we had been in fire and water dangers. Yet on the long perilous ocean voyage, not one of the twelve hundred persons on board had died.



"Now that we were on land again we began to feel hungry. I found a woman who was selling raisin cookies and we bought cookies and a watermelon, and we ate our first meal in America. Both, the cookies and watermelon were delicious. We felt new courage and new strength.

"September 3. Many arrangements were made and our money exchanged. About sixty families decided to go to Nebraska and Dakota, but by far the most decided to go to Kansas. Wm. Ewert and David Goertz, who had come a year sooner, came to meet us. Since some had quite a bit of money, and all wanted to buy land, we were heartily welcomed and treated quite friendly.

"September 4. We boarded the train in New York and how gorgeously equipped it was. Each seat beautifully upholstered. The walls polished. Fresh water available at all times—all one had to do was use the cup chained to a container, turn a handle and drink. Everything was wonderfully nice and convenient. Yes, Thank God we are in America. We passed through William Penn's state but the land did not appeal to us—too much forest and too many stones. Unhaltingly our train flew west. Other trains passing on the adjoining tracks, scared us when they passed by so swiftly. We went through many wonderful cities.

"September 7. At Summerfield, Illinois the Mennonites from there came into the train and welcomed us and handed out good food. One sad incident occurred at one stop when David Unruh discovered after the train was again in motion that he had been robbed. We passed the Missouri and great Mississippi. Now we liked the land better and saw all sorts of crops growing.

"September 8. We arrived at four in the afternoon at Topeka, the capital of Kansas. The train took us into an empty factory building. Close by were wagons with fresh baked bread and other food. In four days we had traveled through seven states. The Santa Fe railroad company owned farther west, every other section of land for twenty miles north they had started the village Gnadenau. This they offered to sell to us. With Elder Ewert we left for Peabody, Marion County.

"September 9, 1874. Arrived at Peabody in the morning. Brother Jacob was there to meet us. What a happy reunion.

"We loaded our baggage and with Franz Groenings and their three children we were a rather full load. Once again we could drive with horses. Everything looked just wonderful to us—better than any other place in America. Jacob told us that about twelve miles north they had started the village Gnadenau. As we drove we soon met an English man with a nice team and wagon. He motioned us to stop, pointed to his horses and wagon and said, "I like to sell." We did not understand a word but Brother Jacob said that he was offering his team and wagon at a reasonable price. Within ten minutes Groening counted out the required money. It seemed like a dream. The man got off the wagon, handed over the lines, told Groening the names of the horses and said, "All yours." Groenings with their baggage, got in the wagon and followed us joyously. It all seemed so strange, sudden, and a little funny—but now we are in America.

"We drove happily on. Soon we saw the village—some twenty-five families lived in all sorts of huts and tents. They had come four weeks sooner. Here was land and more land. Our family, my brother-in-law Cornelius Wedel and his family, our mother Voth with her daughters—all of us moved into Brother Jacob's basement and into tents. From Margenau, Russia to Gnadenau, Kansas, we had traveled thirty-seven days. The trip for tickets, expenses and freight had cost us 248 rubles or \$200. That evening I counted my money and found that I still had ten "Greenbacks" or one thousand dollars.

"Soon we bought 160 acres of land. The price was \$2.85 per acre on time or \$2.00 cash. We paid cash and saved \$136. As immigrants we received free freight service on our heavy trunks, on building material and on feed. I also bought a span of oxen and a wagon for \$145. Since grasshoppers had devoured the crops many native farmers sold out cheaply.

"We hired a negro to do the sod breaking while Benjamin and I made 11,000 mud bricks. Russian style, one foot long, six inches wide, and three inches thick.

"We built an adobe house 26x45 feet for our own home and to receive other arrivals. We took in four families: David Schroeders, John Boeses, Dietrich Wiebes, and Abraham Klassens. Although we were badly crowded and some of the children had scarlet fever, we were happy. God's blessing was graciously with us in all we did, materially and spiritually."

—Peter A. Wiebe.



## CHAPTER IX

### A Profile of the Immigrants

*Man looketh on the outward appearance*—The Lord

Outwardly the immigrants appeared crude and uncouth. Migrations and pioneer days are not conducive to arts and culture and these home seekers have had reputations they ill deserved. In the Netherlands they were considered heretics that must recant or die. In Prussia they were defamed as land leeches. In Russia their prized "Privilegium" was suddenly abrogated and they were looked upon as unpatriotic and undesirable citizens—unless they would accept militarism. When they came to America, exhausted from months of preparation, travel, and anxieties, they aroused a good deal of idle curiosity with their strange customs, odd clothes, and foreign language. The first impressions were not flattering.

The July 29, 1874, **Nebraska Daily State Journal** described the immigrant contingent at the Lincoln fairgrounds. Evidently the report is mixed and refers partly to Hutterite groups.

They seem well pleased with the country. They wear the simple garb of the German peasant, but have well filled wallets. The men are sturdy, healthy looking fellows. The women all wear calico gowns, with a blue handkerchief thrown over their heads, and no sign of ribbons, ear rings, brooches, or even wedding rings. Those articles are considered too worldly. Both men and women are very stoop-shouldered which, we are informed, comes from hard work. The party is not made up of all farmers, but many are clever mechanics, carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, etc. The **New York Herald** reports that the colony is bringing about \$120,000 in gold with them; one of them had a draft of \$25,000 in gold; another for nearly as much; many had letters of credit for sums from \$1,000 to \$3,000. They are reported to have all things in common, but this is contradicted and must be taken with allowance.

The **Topeka Commonwealth** in the September 10, 1874 issue describes the **Teutonia** group in a jocular vein:

Large crowds of visitors flocked to the King's Bridge shops yesterday to see the six hundred Mennonites who arrived there Thursday. They were dressed in their primitive homespun garments which were usually of coarse wool, and of the most primitive style. Our crack tailors would have been puzzled at the choice appearance of those ancient dresses. The women and children were all consuming huge pieces of bread with a rapidity which augured well for their digestion. They had funny old handkerchiefs tied around their heads, and certainly no Broadway milliner ever supplied one of the quaint bonnets which the fair Mennonite beauties wore. They had all brought huge tin pans, crockery, etc., with them and baskets groaning under loads of bread, cheese, and sausage. The men appear to have conscientious scruples against wearing clothes that fit them, the idea appearing to be to get all the cloth you can for the money. The men's vests therefore descend towards the knee, and their pants possess an alarming amount of slack. Their favorite headgear is a flat cloth cap which they pull off in saluting any person. This habit they will soon drop now that they have arrived in Kansas where "nobody respects nothing."

It is interesting to note that this attitude of barbed ridicule soon changed to respect. The same paper reports a few days later that a plan to have a public reception for the immigrants found



CAP



Schildmuetze

KERCHIEF



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Pelzmuetze

ready acceptance. The reason for this public recognition was, "to show our friends from Russia that we recognize and appreciate their presence among us and are anxious to cultivate neighborly relations with them."

While the immigrants were waiting in Topeka they were housed in the King's shops. These shops furnished ample room for the new arrivals. The immigrants made extensive purchases of food, household goods, and implements, and soon the Topeka merchants moved their wares into quarters close to the shops.

Before the settlers left for their future homes, Governor Osborne asked them to visit him at the State Capitol. This is thought to have been the most picturesque reception ever held in Kansas. The strange company, in its none to elaborate costumes, many wearing quaint low slippers (Schlorren), filed through the state house, shaking hands with the chief executive and other state officials. The Governor's hospitality was greatly appreciated by the newcomers and went far in planting the seed of loyalty in their breasts. They accepted wholeheartedly the Kansas motto: "To the Stars Through Difficulties." This was part of their training and heritage.



SEAL OF KANSAS

In early October the immigrants moved to their destinations. There were no homes awaiting them—only the wide sweep of the prairies and in a few instances temporary immigrant sheds. Immediately the settlers went about laying out villages. These, an 1875 visitor says:

"Seemed to be selected with care, each standing on such slight ridges as the prairie afforded. It was summer in Kansas, and the scene was

naturally beautiful; but the scattered or collected Mennonite houses, with their bare walls of sod and boards, and patches of broken prairie, did not at all add to the charm of the scene. The people were like their houses, useful but ugly. They had not yet gotten over the effect of the long ocean voyage or the life in the huddled immigrant quarters at Topeka, where they acquired a reputation for uncleanness which they were far from deserving. Still there was an appearance of resolution and patience about them, taken with the fact that all, men, women and children, were at work, that argued well for the future. It was easy, if possessed with the slightest amount of imagination to see these rude habitations transformed in time to the substantial brick houses surrounded by orchards, such as the people had owned when they lived on the banks of the Molotschna in Russia. Of course it was reasoned that they would remain villagers; they would cling to the customs they had brought from Russia, and remain for generations a peculiar people. They would be industrious; they would acquire wealth; but they would remain destitute of any sense of beauty rather sordid, unsocial, and to that extent undesirable citizens."



Drawing in Frank Leslie's *Illustrierte Zeitung*

The Caption reads: Mennoniten-Niederlassung in Kansas.—Das Innere eines temporären Wohnhaus bei Gnadenu. — (The interior of a temporary residence at Gnadenu.)

These humble strangers indeed had much to learn in a new land with new customs and a new language. Here they had chosen to make their home and here they anchored their hopes. Although by nature reticent and by religious persuasion of the "quiet in the land" they, nevertheless, longed to make friends and they brought with them certain inherent virtues. The young people soon picked up a smattering knowledge of English, but for the older generation the language was very difficult. Many stories are told in regard to the difficulty they had understanding or making themselves understood. Since some words in the English language are quite



similar to the Low or High-German such as come, **komm**; cow, **Koh**; calf, **Kaulf**; wagon, **Wagen**; man **Mann**; they often made their own deductions—not always correct. A lumber dealer delivered some building material to a settler and wished to know where to unload saying, “lumber, lumber.” The immigrant was puzzled but suddenly in his bewilderment ran to his wife shouting: “De Laump! De Laump! He well ne Laump.” (He wants a lamp) The sun was shining brightly. Once an American neighbor greeted a new arrival with a friendly, “How are you folks?” Since “folks” sounds much like the German word **Fuchs**, meaning fox, the settler was baffled but looking about he saw a jack rabbit scamper away and now he knew. Pointing to the rabbit he said: “No Fuchs. It es en Hase.” (Not fox. It is a rabbit.)

At one time a settler came to his American neighbor visibly under a strain saying: “Komm! Fru es krank. Kom! Min Fru es krank.” The Englishman had no idea that **Fru** means wife and **krank**, sick, wondering whether the Dutchman might talk of fruit and a crank, but since the man seemed much concerned that his wife too should **komm**, they both climbed into the wagon and the settler drove in haste to his pioneer house. Once there it took the good English lady only a moment to take control of the situation. Quickly water was set to boil on the crude stove, the men sent to the shed and before long the Kansas population had increased by one sturdy male settler baby.

Philologists have claimed that the Low-German that nearly all of the immigrants spoke was actually closer related to English than to High-German. Some of the young immigrant teachers began to teach in English schools after a few weeks of training.

Basically the immigrants believed in **good citizenship**. They loved the government under which they lived. They fully believed that “the powers that be are ordained of God.” True to New Testament teachings they felt that the way to overcome evil is through good. It was not for them to make laws but to obey them. Civil obligations must be carried out conscientiously. Governments must be respected, “prayed” for, and taxes paid promptly.

They were inherently **honest**. There were exceptions, of course, but by and large they held that a word is a bond, debts must be paid, and promises kept. The merchants found that the newcomers bought cautiously, often haggled outrageously, but they did not beg, steal, or charge. They paid cash. In their religious concept honesty was fundamental. They, in turn, expected others to be honest. One of the immigrants handed his American neighbor a fifty dollar bill with the request to bring him smaller change from town. The English neighbor did as asked but expressed his surprise that anyone would so trust a near stranger.

All through the centuries the ancestors of the immigrants have been known for **economy** and **thrift**. These virtues were born in adversities and helped them to survive. The line between frugality and stinginess is delicate and easily becomes blurred and these people have appeared to others as covetous and miserly. Their



clothing was simple, home-spun, and patched. They had been taught for economical and religious reasons to avoid any display of extravagance and to discard nothing of value. Once used match sticks were saved and for fuel they used straw, brush, and cow chips. Yet these people had a tradition never to turn a needy wanderer from their door, unfed and unsheltered.



Courtesy Kansas Historical Society

A Pioneer Woman Gathering Cow Chips

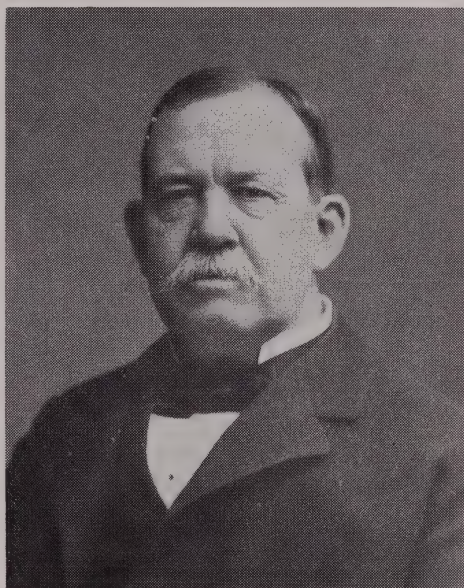
The immigrants believed in **cooperation**. Outwardly their innate reticence, the language barrier, and their different ways have given the appearance of unneighborliness. Yet, they banded themselves together in villages, not alone for reasons of safety but mainly because they believed in mutual assistance. Illness, building, harvesting, and the prosaic "butchering" were often shared by neighbors. C. H. Wedel observes that, "as a pioneer settler the Mennonite was particularly successful because he moved as a community with schools and churches."

Perhaps the most outstanding character trait of these people was their concept of the **dignity of work**. They accepted as unalterable the biblical injunction: "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread." Work, to them, was a blessing in disguise. Idleness, except on Sundays, was dangerous and sinful. The children were trained to help on the farm and in the kitchen, and to look on work as necessary, enjoyable, and dignified. Extended vacations, five day weeks, and eight hour days were unknown to them as well as "sit down" strikes. They believed in crop insurance by "plowing the dew under."

## An Objective Look at the Settlements in the Fall of 1875\*

by N. L. Prentis

Talking the other day with C. B. Schmidt, the foreign missionary of the Santa Fe, we asked him concerning the present whereabouts and prospects of the Mennonite immigrants, whereupon Mr. Schmidt suggested that the questioner visit the Mennonites and enable himself to answer his own question. The suggestion was unanimously adopted.



NOBLE LOVELY PRENTIS—1829-1899

This able Kansas historian once said: "In twenty years there has scarcely been a day when I have not said some word for Kansas, the land of the sunflower and the breeze." His writings, often spiced with humor, display a warmth and an unusual degree of understanding of the problems of the Mennonite immigrants.

The original objective point of the trip was Halstead, where Mr. B. Warkentin, a Mennonite, has a fine flouring mill; but circumstances changed cases, so that our railroad journey ended at Newton. Mr. Warkentin, by the way, was met on the train going down, with his bride, a young lady from Summerfield, Illinois. The bridegroom, bride, two brothers-in-law, and a sister of the bride made up a gay party.

In the morning bright and early the "outfit" started from Newton. Ours was "A Journey Due North," over prairie and over a road now used almost exclusively by the Mennonite settlers; in fact the first team we met was that of a Mennonite who was going to Newton with a wagonload of watermelons. He very politely handed over a melon, selecting one which he said was of Russian origin. It was a very fine one and this brings up the subject of watermelons, as connected with the Mennonite migration.

The Mennonites have a decided preference for watermelons over every other "fruit." They call the melons "arboosen," although we would not be willing to certify that this is the correct spelling. The last detachment

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\* *Kansas Miscellanies*, published 1889.



happened to arrive at Atchison on Saturday—market day,— and among the first objects they saw were the big Kansas watermelons. They “went for them then and thar,” and felt that they had reached the “happy land of Canaan.” Unless some other state can raise larger watermelons than Kansas — which some other state can’t — the future Mennonite migration will be directed hitherward. The fondness for watermelon is an indication of the peaceable and sensible character of the Mennonite people. The American prefers to migrate to a country where he has a chance to be eaten up by grizzlies and chased by wolves, and can exercise his bowie-knife on the active red man, while the Mennonite sees no fun in danger, abhors war, and so seeks out a fertile, peaceable country, where he buries his glittering steel, not in the hearts of his enemies, but in the bowels of the luscious watermelon.

The first Mennonite residence reached was that of “Bishop Buller.” The Mennonites recognize but one order in their ministry, that of the “elder,” who is elected by the congregation, and is usually a farmer like the rest. At Mr. Buller’s we saw an evidence of progress. One of the stone rollers which was procured to thresh grain was lying in the yard, while a short distance away was an American threshing machine in full blast.

Mr. Buller accompanied us to the residence of Abraham Reimer, who is a leading man among his people. The establishment of Mr. Reimer afforded a good idea of what Mennonite thrift has already accomplished. His house was a substantial frame structure with two large barns and at the rear of it numerous stacks of grain arranged in a semi-circle. A stout boy and a girl were engaged near by in stacking hay, the young lady officiating on top of the stack. That the Mennonite, the female Mennonite, is not destitute for an eye of the beautiful, was shown by a well-kept flower garden at the end of the house. It is true that the flowers were arranged in straight rows and were such floral old-timers as pinks, marigolds, and the like, but after all, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these.

The Abraham Reimer Farm in 1877



Straw and hay stacks to the left. Farm buildings in center. — Trees to the right

Out in the dooryard there was that queer blending of races often seen in Kansas. There were Mennonites, and in the midst was a horse trader of the usual American type, and with him a young colored man who spoke German and acted as interpreter. An object of interest to all except the Mennonites was a Russian farm wagon, noticeable for its short coupling, narrow “track,” flaring bed painted green, and a profusion of blacksmith’s work all over.

The interior of the house consisted of two rooms, as yet unplastered. The only “foreign contrivance” to attract a stranger’s notice was the bedstead and bedding, the latter piled up in a high stack when not in use and covered with a calico spread. The top of the high, narrow pile resembled a coffin, and conveying the unpleasant impression to the visitor that he had just arrived in time for a funeral. In the “best” room a meeting



was in progress. The room was quite full, and the visages of all present were as immovable as the green and gold face of a Russian clock, that ticked on the wall. These clocks are seen everywhere. They sport a long pendulum with a disk as big as a buckwheat cake, and long, heavy hanging weights of brass. There was not a newspaper in sight, and no books, save a black-covered German Bible, according to the version of Dr. Luther, and several Mennonite hymn books, bound in leather and printed in Odessa. There were few relics of Russia to be seen, especially no pictures of any sort. In every kitchen, however, is a Russian teakettle, a large affair of copper, lined with tin; and at Bishop Buller's we saw some wooden bowls, curiously painted and gilded.

After the council had broken up, dinner followed, being neat and clean. The leading features were fried cakes, the English name of which appeared to be "roll cake"; then there was black rye bread—very good—, and excellent butter. We would not omit to add that there was also watermelon. Everything indicated that the Mennonite is "fixed"; he is a good liver, and hospitable in any event.

We finally took leave from Abraham Reimer, who shook hands cordially though he did not kiss Mr. Schmidt as he did the Mennonite brethren when they left. The luxury of men kissing each other appears to be exclusively confined to the Mennonite church.

## A Look at the Settlements in June, 1878

by C. L. Bernay in *Zur Heimat*, June 10, 1878

They have been so successful with their choice that the leaders of the Mennonite churches whom we visited yesterday, assured us that all the damage they had suffered through loss of time and money for the long journey, had already been compensated for after their third harvest.

Ten thousand of these folks have settled here in southwest Kansas, where they have benefited from cheap land, rich soil, the help of a railroad company, and American farm implements. What we found here is the result of these favorable conditions and the fruit of the immigrant characteristics.

Thus, we find these simple but well-disciplined German Russian Mennonites engaged in extensive farming. forty-, eighty-, one hundred twenty-, and even thousand acre fields are sown to wheat. The Mennonites use American plows, drills, mowers, and threshing machines for their cultivation. Of all their implements they have kept only one—the really remarkable, wide, wooden pitchfork—and adopted all other American implements. Upon their arrival they had clumsy threshing stones with notches which, seen from the top, had the shape of a star. They had used such threshing stones in Russia but realized very soon that the use of this crude threshing stone in the large wheat harvests would set them far behind their neighbors who were using American threshing machines. They bought new machinery, and these stones, which had to be dragged by horses over the scattered grain, are now lying in the farmyards as reminders of the first years.

Soon agriculture will take on a strange new character even for the Mennonites on their isolated farms, as a result of large-scale farming, farm machinery, railroads, and the lack of private granaries. The simplicity and romance of farming will be lost as rural life takes on such an industrialized pattern that we cannot speak any longer of the poetry that was in it. Even the Mennonites, in spite of all their reluctance, will be drawn into the whirlpool of the purely mechanical trend. We hope that they may be able to retain their spiritual discipline in order to keep their virtues as a people.

Unless years of failure interfere, the richness of the land and the creative work of the settlers will no doubt serve to maintain the happy disposition which one encounters all over, and which contrasts strikingly with the continual complaining about bad business so prevalent in western cities and in the country all over. Should this whole section of the country succeed in building up a sound commercial foundation, then Kansas could easily become a second Illinois in terms of prosperity of its inhabitants.

## An Objective Look at the Mennonite Settlements in the Spring of 1882

by N. L. Prentis

For the first time the writer was enabled to carry into effect a long-cherished purpose to return and take another look at the Mennonites. The wheat waved a varying shade of green, shifting in its lines like sea water; the prairie chicken rose on whirring wing before the old hunting dog who ran before the carriage; and a meadow lark rehearsed a few notes of its never-ending song.

A great change had taken place in the country since my last visit. The then raw prairie was now very much like Illinois. After about ten miles we came to the first habitation, in what seemed to be the edge of a young forest, and I then learned what I had never before heard, or else had forgotten, that the Mennonite had abandoned the village system, and now lived "each man to himself." They tried the village three years but some confusion arose in regard to paying taxes, and besides, it is in the air, this desire for absolute personal and family independence; and so they went on their lands, keeping, however, as close together as the lay of the country would permit. Sometimes there are four houses to the quarter section; sometimes four to the section. The grand divisions of New Alexanderwohl, Hoffnungsthal and Gnadenau still exist, but each group of farms has a name of its own, revealing a poetical tendency somewhere, as Green Field, Field of Grace, Vale of Hope, and so on.

The most surprising thing about these places is the growth of trees. I left bare prairie; I returned to find a score of miniature forests in sight from any point of view. Several acres around every house were set in hedges, orchards, lanes and alleys of trees—trees in lines, trees in groups, and trees all alone. In many cases the houses were hardly visible from the road, and in a few years will be entirely hidden in the cool shade. Where the houses were only a few hundred yards apart, a path ran from one to the other, between two lines of poplars or cottonwoods.

We wished to see a few specimen Mennonites and their homes, and called first on Jacob Schmidt, who showed us the silkworms feeding in his best room. On tables and platforms a layer of mulberry twigs had been laid, and these were covered with thousands of worms. As fast as the leaves are eaten fresh twigs are added. As the worms grow, more room is provided for them, and they finally eat mulberry brush by the wagonload. Mr. Schmidt said the floor of his garret would soon be covered. It seemed strange that the gorgeous robes of beauty should begin with this blind, crawling green worm, gnawing ravenously at a leaf.

We next went to the house of Peter Schmidt. Had I been an artist I should have sketched Peter Schmidt, of Emmathal, as the typical prosperous Mennonite. He was a big man, on the shady side of forty. His face, round as the moon, was sunburned to a walnut brown. He was very wide fore and aft; he wore a vest that buttoned to his throat, a sort of brown blouse, and a pair of very roomy and very short breeches, while his bare feet were thrust into a sort of sandals, very popular with the Mennonites. He showed with pride his mulberry hedges. Another source of pride were the apricots. The seed was brought from Russia, and the trees bore plentifully last year, and the Mennonites taking them to Newton as a lunch, were agreeably surprised by an offer of \$3 a bushel for them.

A happy man was Peter Schmidt, and well satisfied with his adopted country, for when I managed to mix enough German and English together to ask him how he liked America as compared with Russia, he answered in a deep voice, and with his little smile: "Besser." With a hearty goodbye we pursued our journey, passing many houses, hedges and orchards, and finally came to the home of Heinrich Richert of Blumenfeld, or Flower Field.

This place was of the more modern type. The house was a plain frame, of the American pattern, but the stable had a roof of thatch, on which the doves clung and cooed, as you see them in pictures. When Mr. Richert came in from the fields, his bright eye, his square jaw, and the

way he stood on his legs showed that he was accustomed to authority. He had, in fact, been a schoolmaster in Russia, and in America occasionally exercised his gift as a preacher. In the sitting room, which had no carpet, but a pine floor which fairly shone, was a bookcase set in a wall and filled with books, which usually are not very common in Mennonite houses. It was decided to accept the hospitality of these good people, and the mother and daughters got supper—and such a supper! Such bread and butter and preserves; and everything, nearly, on the bill of fare was the product of this six-year-old farm.



Courtesy Mennonite Life

**Mr. and Mrs. Heinrich Richert of Blumenfeld**

At breakfast the conversation turned on the wonderful success of the Mennonites with all kinds of trees, quite excelling anything known by Americans, with all their low-spirited horticultural societies. Herr Richert remarked that one thing that helped the trees was "plowing the dew under." This is one of the secrets of Mennonite success—they "plow the dew under" in the morning, and do not stop plowing till the dew falls at evening.\*

At the humble dwelling of Johann Krause we witnessed the process of reeling raw silk. The work was done by Mrs. Krause, on a rude twister and reel of home construction. The cocoons were placed in a trough of boiling water, and the woman, with great dexterity, caught up the threads of light cocoons, twisting them into two threads and running these on the reel. The work required infinite patience, of which few Americans are possessed.

We drove for miles with many Mennonite houses in sight, and the most promising orchards and immense fields of the greenest wheat. I have never elsewhere seen such a picture of agricultural prosperity. If anyone has not yet made up his mind as to the possibilities of Kansas agriculture, I recommend a visit to the Mennonite settlement.

It is a matter, I regret to say, of uncertainty whether the work begun by the Mennonite settlers will be completed. If the sons and grandsons of Peter Schmidt of Emmathal and Heinrich Richert of Blumenfeld will walk in the ways of those worthy men, the result will be something like fairyland—the fairies being, however, substantial men, weighing about 185 pounds each. The orchards will bud and bloom, and amid them will stand the solid brick houses like those of Russia, and the richest farmers of Kansas will dwell therein. But there is a danger that this will not come to pass. **Jacob** and **David** will go to work on the railroad and let the plow take care of itself; **Susanna** and **Aganetha** will go to service in town, and

\* It appears that Mr. Richert coined the phrase "Plowing the dew under."



fall to wearing fine clothes, and marrying American gentiles; and the evil day may come when the descendants of the Mennonites of the old stock will be cushioning store-boxes, saving the nation with the mouth, or even going about like a roaring lion, seeking a nomination for Congress. I wish I could believe it otherwise. I wish our atmosphere did not make us all so smart that we cannot enjoy good health. Were it not for the accursed vanity and restlessness which is our heritage, I could indulge in a vision of the future—of a peaceful, quiet, wealthy people, undisturbed by the throes of speculation and politics, dwelling in great content under the vines and the mulberry trees which their fathers planted in the grassy wind-swept prairie.

### A Retrospective Look

In 1927 the writer obtained the following statistics in regard to the descendants of Peter Schmidt of Emmenthal and Heinrich Richert of Blumenfeld. Of the children and grandchildren of Peter Schmidt: One was a minister, five school teachers, one a missionary, two missionary candidates, one a nurse, eight farmers, five housekeepers, one a carpenter, one a mail carrier, two business men, and five were attending college. (C. H. Friesen, 1927.)

Of the children and grandchildren of Heinrich Richert: Twenty were in the teaching profession, seven in universities and colleges, three were ministers, two missionaries, three in business, fifteen housekeepers, eighteen farmers, one a writer, and five in miscellaneous trades. (Rev. P. H. Richert, 1927.)

What about **Jacob, David, Susanna and Aganetha**? In 1927 Jacob was president of the mutual fire insurance company, custodian of Bethel College, and on the Board of Directors of Bethel College. David, since 1906, had been professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Bethel. Susanna had become the wife of Cornelius H. Wedel,

### A Son of Heinrich Richert



David H. (Daddy) Richert began to teach in high school in 1902. — Emeritus professor of Mathematics and Astronomy since 1946 at Bethel College.

## A Grandson of Heinrich Richert



Dr. Theodore O. Wedel, son of Susanna Richert Wedel. Canon of the Washington Cathedral and Warden of the College of Preachers, Washington, D. C.

for seventeen years president of Bethel college and noted Mennonite historian. Aganetha had become the wife of a prosperous farmer. Her six sons were all farmers except one who was still in high school. To a large extent, Mr. Prentis's conjectures had not come true. A good per cent had remained on the farm—others were engaged in occupations and professions. Few, if any, had become store-box whittlers, politicians, or models, although all wore clothes of American pattern.<sup>2</sup>

After a decade of life in America thousands of immigrants became owners of well-ordered and well-equipped farms. Crop failures, dry spells, hail storms, tornadoes, and other setbacks were taken in stride and overcome by perseverance and thrift. None of the immigrants returned to Russia to live. Only a few have ever visited their former home. Not all immigrants prospered but the writer has not become aware of a single instance of an immigrant regretting the change to America. When later groups migrated from the states and Canada, they went south, north, or west but not east or back to Europe. But the immigrants have sent thousands of dollars and shiploads of food and clothing to famine stricken people in Russia and elsewhere.

Although of a minority group in faith and religiously inclined to withdraw from the world, the immigrants and their descendants, have played a creditable role in the cultural and economic development of the country. One observer states: "All through the west



### A Kansas Immigrant's Home\*—1885



A house, barn and granary built by one of the 1874 immigrants in 1885. The couple came to America with two small children and one thousand dollars. The house had nine rooms and a basement and the barn was a side-hill or bank type three story structure.

men and women of German-Russian parentage are holding positions of usefulness and influence in business, as public officials, school superintendents, college and university professors, doctors, and in other roles of public trust.”<sup>3</sup>



Reliving Pioneer Days — Hillsboro Anniversary Celebration, 1959

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\* Birthplace and parental home of the writer of this report.



## DIT AUMERIKAU

## A Settler's Lament

De Schlorre saul eck nich mea droage,  
 Mutasch Scheeleedog ligt deep en de Kist;  
 Em Stauhl steit en "Amerikaunescha" Woauge,  
 Daut olle Russland kaum enna faumisst.

De Taxe senn kaum to betoahle,  
 Oba bim pleege sett wie fein up ne Sett;  
 Maest saumle? Wie haette met Koahle,  
 Un to Fresteck aett wie gekoffte Graett.

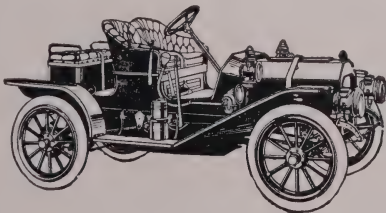
Wea weet waut de Tokunft wauet bringe!  
 Mi sitt daut doch manchmoal racht bunt;  
 Met lache, un daunze, un singe,  
 Ging Frankreich doch schlieszlich to grund.

It schiehnt so wie motte uns schekke,  
 To faellet waut uns nich gefaellt;  
 Eck nann se moh "Amerikaunische Nekke,"  
 Dit es hia ne gauns aundere Welt.

De Peta denkt bloss aun "Drasche",  
 Un Aubraum plauppet emma fon "School;"  
 De Liske singt "Amerikanische" Leeda,  
 Un Mutta? Knett "socks" em Schockelstoohl.

Unse Grethke sull Erdschocke hakke,  
 Stracks wea Hiebat's Knaals wada doar;  
 Nu sen se bim Sonneblomme Soaet knakke,  
 Dit es je hia waurhauffig wunderboar.

Oba ehnt mott eck doch die saga,  
 Trig noa Russland? Nea. Nimma mea!  
 Un Dietschlaund? Doar huust je de Bismaurk.  
 Nea! Nea! Wie bliewe schmock hia.



The first automobile on the streets of Hillsboro  
 was a 1902 model, owned by G. L. Klassen.

Cut from J. J. Wiebe Print Shop

**THIS AMERICA**

(Freely translated)

I shall no more wear my sandals,  
Mother's kerchief lies deep in the chest;  
In the shed stands an American wagon,  
And Russia no longer is missed.

The taxes go higher and higher,  
But when we plow we sit on a seat;  
Burn cow chips? We use coal for our fire,  
And for breakfast—boughten oatmeal we eat.

Who knows what the future may bring us!  
It often looks gloomy to me  
With laughter, and dancing, and singing  
France perished — and so may we.

It seems that we must make adjustments  
To much that is silly and new;  
I call them "American follies,"  
But this is the way we do.

Our Peter thinks only of "threshing,"  
Abram's school prattle is hard to bear;  
And Lizzie sings "American" ditties.  
And mother? Knits socks in the rocking chair.

We sent Margaret potato hoeing;  
Soon Hiebert's Cornelius was there,  
With sunflower seeds and chatter wooing;  
It certainly is a queer world here.

But one thing I will have to tell you:  
Return to Russia? No! Never fear!  
And Germany? To the tyrant Bismarck?  
No! No! We are staying right here.

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**Chapter IX References**

- 1 N. L. Prentis, **Kansas Miscellanies**.
- 2 D. V. Wiebe, **Mennonite Institutions of Higher Learning**, 1927.
- 3 C. Henry Smith, **The Story of the Mennonites**, p. 670.

## CHAPTER X

### The Mustard Seed — Wheat

*A sower went forth to sow—Christ*

The Mennonites, through the efforts of their Agricultural Association, had become successful wheat raisers and fully conscious of the importance of good seed. According to a report, they had been selling 10,000,000 bushels annually to the Liverpool markets and their wheat brought ten per cent more per bushel than almost any other.<sup>1</sup> In Kansas they found the soil, climate, and growing season quite similar to that of South Russia. It was natural for them to carry with them a little of their best wheat seed as well as some mulberry, apricot, olive, and watermelon seed. The wheat had originally come from Turkey.

No particular family nor a single immigrant group can be given sole credit for the introduction of the **hard Russian** winter wheat.\* Three things, however, are well established. (1) The Mennonites in Russia raised large quantities of hard winter wheat. (2) Immigrants brought with them small quantities of the hard wheat. (3) Kansas had other winter wheat varieties but the raising of winter wheat had not gained proportions until the Mennonite settlers came and introduced the **hard** wheat.

Winter wheat had been grown in Kansas before the Mennonite immigrants arrived. The Rev. Olaf Ollson, an early Swedish settler at Lindsborg, wrote in 1869 to his friends in Sweden: "**We are using winter wheat here for the first time.**"<sup>2</sup> When the settlers arrived they were fortunate to find winter wheat seed available for planting besides the little seed they had brought from Russia. The **Marion County Record**, August 15, 1874, stated that on account of the drought and grasshopper plague the Santa Fe company would make available for fall planting, seed wheat, on the condition that the farmer would return to the company at harvest, one and a half bushels for each bushel of seed loaned.

The Kansas Board of Agriculture reported in 1872: "Corn is the principal crop in Kansas."—"Wheat is one of our least profitable crops." In 1873 the State Board reported that Risley township (then comprising Risley and Liberty townships) had fifty-one acres planted to winter wheat. In a few years the situation changed radically. In 1875 the State Board reports: "That on new ground no crop is more certain than wheat, is clearly settled." One of the 1874 immigrants rented fifteen acres of broken prairie from a homesteader who had become discouraged and had left. He reports: "Nine months later I harvested four hundred and fifty bushels of wheat. We now had enough for seed and enough to live on for the coming year."<sup>3</sup>

\* Some reports give the Gnadenau group sole credit for the introduction of the hard wheat but the writer has never heard this group make such a claim. The wheat was called, Russian, Turkey, and Crimean.



The immigrants were accustomed to wheat raising and from the beginning this was their chief crop. In a few years it became generally known that the **hard** wheat far surpassed the Kansas winter varieties in hardiness and yield. Each year more of the hard was sown and less of the native. The **Abilene Chronicle**, June 17, 1881, stated: "Last September M. Zook sowed eighty acres of a variety which he calls Russian wheat, which was introduced into McPherson county a few years ago by Mennonites who emigrated from Russia. We have been interviewing that field very closely all winter and spring and we have come to the conclusion that it is by far the hardest wheat we have seen in Kansas."

An observer who made a tour of several central Kansas counties reported in the **Chase County Leader**, September 8, 1881: "The west half of Marion County has the best wheat; in some localities going up to twenty-five bushels per acre, the farm over. In this locality too, a new kind of wheat, known there as Russian wheat excells all others—a large grain and well matured. This I am told was introduced by the Russians" (Mennonites). Another later report states: "Day after day, through all the fall and winter, the Mennonites come in with wheat, The native Amercian stands on the street corner and complains, but the Mennonites come with wheat. The Farmers Alliance holds its secret and noiseless sessions, and nothing breaks the silence save the chuck of the Mennonite wheat laden wagon." <sup>4</sup>

An 1892 report indicates how the new wheat had increased. Marion county had ten per cent soft wheat and ninety per cent hard; Harvey county had five per cent soft and ninety-five per cent hard, and Reno county reported only hard winter wheat.

Attempts were made to trace the exact history of the introduction of the hard winter wheat but the immigrants; either out of a sense of modesty or because it had been a general thing to bring some seed, made no specific claims.\* Editor E. W. Hoch of the **Marion County Record** became interested in the wheat and urged his readers to report their findings but no particulars were reported. T. C. Henry, a real estate dealer at Abilene, began to sow the hard winter wheat in 1877. He said: "I know nothing of its origin. The wheat farmers of Kansas should offer a prize for this information."\*\*

The wheat produced well but it was one thing to find the right variety and another to find the mills to grind it. The mills were not equipped to grind this hard variety; the stone burrs had to be replanced with steel rollers and the flour of the Russian or Red Turkey wheat was darker in color. At the Junction City, Kansas City, St. Louis and Cincinnati wheat markets the hard wheat had a bad reputation—some millers condemning it as al-

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\* Wm. B. Bracke in **Wheat Country** states that in Bethel College "in a well guarded vault are housed documents to prove that Mennonites alone brought winter wheat into Kansas, a fact frequently although unsuccessfully disputed.

\*\* Henry began his wheat growing operations in 1873 to promote his land selling campaign. He broke 500 acres of sod, using six-yoke ox teams, pulling twenty inch moline plows. Each year he experimented with different varieties.

most worthless. The **Abilene Chronicle**, July 28, 1883, indicates the price discrimination against the hard wheat: No. 1, wheat—80 cents per bushel. No. 2, 75 cents. Russian 72 cents. A letter to the Halstead grain buyer, Peter Wiebe, from the St. Louis Grain merchants stated:

"We have found it almost impossible to work off that Turkey wheat. We wish you farmers would abandon it and use May and Fultz wheat, both of which are always in demand and bring a good price."<sup>5</sup> At places the hard wheat was discounted as much as twenty cents per bushel. "Only the Mennonite housewife found no complaint with the flour because they were able to bake their **Zwieback** every Saturday just as tasty as they had baked this bread in the old country."<sup>6</sup>

One by one the mills were equipped with steel rollers. The development of the milling process and the processing of the flour were aided by Bernard Warkentin, the first Russian Mennonite immigrant and the first Mennonite miller. Before the Krimmer group and other contingents arrived, Warkentin was already building his water operated flouring mill at Halstead.



Flour and grist mill in Halstead.

In 1885, Warkentin is credited with importing a large shipment of wheat seed from Crimea and in 1901, a committee of Kansas millers and grain dealers instructed him to import 15,000 bushels more seed from South Russia.

The introduction of the Red Turkey wheat, although coming more as the result of a happy accident than a planned procedure, is the most outstanding economic contribution that the Mennonite immigrants have made. For many years the settlers raised this variety almost exclusively. In 1904, one of the 1874 immigrants was awarded the Gold Medal for Red Turkey wheat by the Saint Louis World's Fair and Louisiana Purchase Exposition.\* For thirty years this individual as well as his neighbors had sown and harvested Red Turkey wheat.

\* Awarded to Peter A. Wiebe, father of the writer. The wheat was raised under ordinary farm practices and the sample was taken out of a large bin as threshed without special selection or cleaning.



## Grand Prize for Red Turkey Wheat—1904



The wheat grew and multiplied far beyond expectations. One study says:

If the thousands of Mennonites had never done anything else than introduce the wheat from Crimea, which has made Kansas such a rich and prosperous wheat state, they would have been a great asset. But with the wheat they brought practical technical knowledge in the raising of that wheat; and capital to invest in lands to plant that wheat, and brain and brawn to wisely invest the capital and to till the lands. For many years over the Santa Fe, Rock Island, and Pacific Railways, Kansas has shipped flour to every state in the Union, by the trainload each day, and Kansas has become the great wheat state of the Union." 7

## Memorial, Newton, Kansas



The Memorial has the following inscription: COMMEMORATING ENTRY INTO KANSAS FROM RUSSIA OF TURKEY RED HARD WHEAT BY MENNONITES, 1874



How many of the immigrants brought seed or how much was brought will probably never be known. The following references were written and published when many of the original settlers were still living.

Anna Barkman,\* eight years old, sat in a bin of wheat, picking up grains of wheat, one at a time and putting the best ones in a gallon bucket. Her father, Peter Barkman, told her to pick two gallons of wheat. "You must choose only the largest grains, which have a reddish color and are of good shape," said Barkman. "If the grains are pale, or small, or soft, throw them aside. Next month we will start for Kansas to make our home there."

It was slow work, picking seed wheat, for it takes more than 250,000 grains to fill two gallons. For a week Anna worked every day in the bin. How her father's face lighted up when he saw the wheat. It was April when Anna picked the wheat (1874). Her home then was on a farm near Caslov, a city of Crimea in Russia. 8

### Monument to Red Turkey Wheat, Walton, Kansas

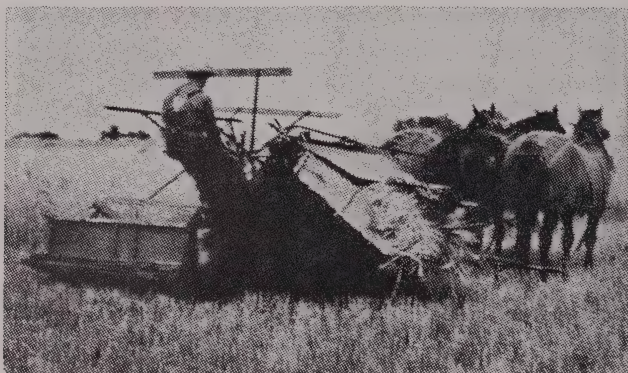


Mark Alfred Carlton, Cerealist, Bureau of Plant Industry, states in the YEARBOOK OF THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (1914, page 199): "The First Mennonite settlements were made in 1873 near Newton, Halstead, and Moundridge. Each family brought over a bushel or more of Crimean wheat for seed, and from this seed was grown the first crop of Kansas hard winter wheat."

An article in the *Topeka Capital*, April 5, 1931, states: Mrs. Flaming still has the original trunk in which she and her husband, Andreas Flaming, brought with them from Russia a gallon of the precious wheat seed which was to make Kansas famous as a wheat producing state. When Mr. and

\* Anna came to Gnadenu in 1874 and later with her husband, John Wohlgenuth, lived in the Hoffnungsthal village. Her father, Peter Barkman, located in the Gnadenu village on the tract on which later the Gnadenu church and Gnadenu school stood.

Mrs. Flaming came to America with the other pioneers who had obtained farms from the Santa Fe railroad in the spring of 1874, they planted their gallon of hard wheat the following fall and it yielded three bushels of fine quality grain. Everyone of the other twenty-three original families also had brought a small quantity of wheat with them."



A recent editorial by William Randolph Nelson states: You probably recall the story of the Mennonites. Catharine the Great of Russia was impressed with the efficiency of the Mennonite farmers in Prussia so she made them an offer designed to get them to move into the Ukraine and Crimea. She said Russia would grant religious freedom, the right to operate their own schools, maintain their local government functions, to follow their normal mode of life and would give them land. Also she exempted them from military service, which was something they objected to strenuously in Germany. The Empress promised the agreement would be binding for 100 years. Many accepted her offer and moved to Russia.

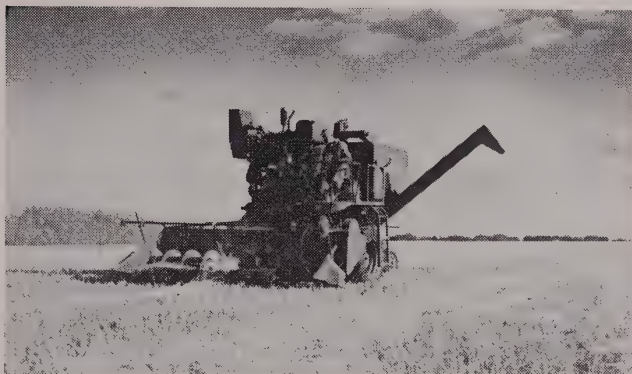
Meanwhile, Germany had not wanted to lose all these good farmers so she, too, offered the Mennonites exemption from military service for 100 years. However, other Germans resented this and Bismarck, who was developing the modern German empire, announced the agreement would not be renewed. The same announcement was made by the current Russian government. Both governments said the Mennonites could go where they pleased. Bismarck, so the stories record, thought they would return to Germany. Instead, the Mennonites in Russia along with many of their families in Germany, came to America, most of them to Kansas.

They brought with them the turkey wheat, a hard, red, winter variety that made Kansas the greatest wheat state. Incidentally, this wheat seed was the most carefully selected ever taken into the state. The Mennonites had obtained the wheat originally in Turkey, hence the name. That which was brought to America was selected grain by grain by children. Each family brought a peck or more.<sup>9</sup>

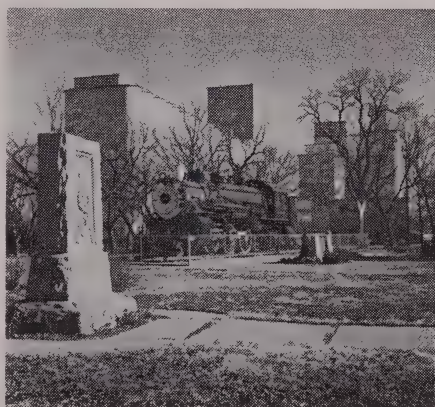
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- 1 **Marion County Record**, April 18, 1874.
- 2 **Kansas Historical Quarterly**, Autumn 1955, page 499.
- 3 Peter A. Wiebe, **Autobiography**.
- 4 **Lawrence Record**, 1894.
- 5 **Halstead Independent**, August 31, 1883.
- 6 C. Krahn, **From the Steppes to the Prairies**.
- 7 M. R. Wheeler, **Kansas University Thesis**, 1920.
- 8 Bliss Isely, **Early Days in Kansas**, page 142.
- 9 W. R. Nelson, **Kansas City Star Farmer**, July 28, 1954.





Today the Kansas Sky Line is dotted with Mills and Elevators



Newton in the heart of the wheat country,  
has four flour mills



Farmers Co-op Elevator at Halstead



Farmers Equity Elevator of Hillsboro



Farmers Commission Elevator at Hutchinson



## CHAPTER XI

### The Immigrants Establish Churches

*Ye also, as lively stones are built up a spiritual house—Peter*

The first church established in America was the **Gnadenau Mennonite Church of Gnadenau, Marion County.**\* The group came to America as an organized unit, intent to continue their fellowship. They had emigrated for "conscience sake" and wished to carry on their church practices as they had done in Crimea. Their first gathering in America took place, July 19, 1874, in the Elkhart, Indiana "Prairie Street" church. About a month later the group came to Peabody, Kansas on August 16, and that same evening the church met in Mrs. Peter Funk's recently constructed barn, located about four miles north of the Gnadenau village site. Here tables were spread for a simple meal and a praise service.\*\* The next day they settled in Gnadenau. For a place of worship a primitive sod structure was erected of prairie sod, laid one on another like bricks but without a foundation and with a reed grass thatched roof.

#### A Conception of the Gnadenau Sod Church, 1874 to 1877



This was the first place of worship erected by the 1874 immigrants.

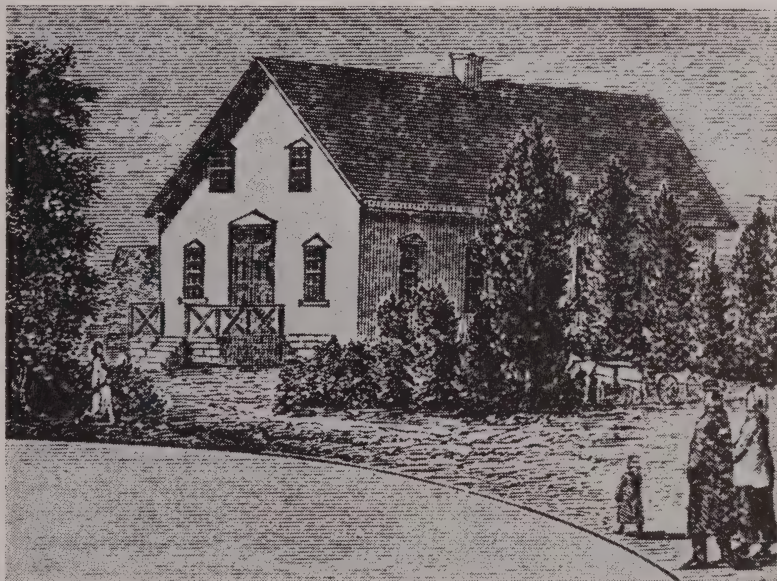
This crude structure was used for church services for more than two years until in 1877 its walls crumbled and it was replaced by a new frame church erected on the south side of the village street near to where later the Gnadenau school was placed.

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\* Incorporated under this name in 1877. In 1899 the name was changed to Gnadenau Crimean Mennonite Brethren Church.

\*\* The Funks had constructed a stone house and a large barn in the spring of 1874 before Peter Funk died in June, 1874.

The **Marion County Record**, March 2, 1877, stated: "Quite a large but plain church has been erected at Gnadenau." This was the first frame church erected by the immigrants in America. The structure was twenty-four feet wide and forty-eight feet long with ten feet high walls. The Santa Fe transported the lumber free from Kansas City. The outside was made of lapsiding and the inside was laid out with adobe bricks. Each family contributed two hundred bricks.



Gnadenau Frame Church—1877 to about 1885.

A few families had arrived in America from Russia and Prussia in the summer of 1873. Among these early arrivals were Peter and Jacob Funk who settled about six miles northwest of Marion Center in Kansas. The following spring, Elder Wilhelm Ewert, Frank Funk, and Cornelius Jantz joined the colony and on May 17, 1874, Elder Ewert conducted a service in a district school. More immigrants joined the settlement and on December 26, 1874, like-minded persons organized the **Bruderthal Mennonite** church, with Ewert, the former deputy, as leader. The name Bruderthal was chosen because the land of three brothers joined at the place where the organization took place. At first the services were held in private homes but from 1875 on in a district school building. An 1878 report gives the population of the Bruderthal congregation as eighteen families. In 1885 the congregation purchased the school building and altered it to make it a convenient place of worship.

Among the groups that settled in Kansas the Alexanderwohl congregation was by far the largest, numbering about eight hun-



dred. Traditionally the name Alexanderwohl came from Czar Alexander I, who wished the group of about thirty families well when they came to Russia in 1821. Another version has it as, "Alexander, we wish you well."



Photo Bethel College Historical Library

**Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church in Russia**

The Alexanderwohl congregation is unique in that its church records go back as far as 1661, to Behrend Ratzlaff, the organizer of the church in Holland. Until 1785, the congregation, then in Prussia, still used the Dutch language in their church services. They came to Russia, led by Elder Peter Wedel, and settled in the Molotschna colony, but fifty-three years later, after having waited anxiously for nine months for passports, almost entirely embarked for America. Only seven families remained in Russia.

The contingent was chartered on two ships; the larger group led by Elder Jacob Buller, left on the Cimbria and a smaller group, left on a much inferior vessel, the Teutonia. Buller's group consisted of about six hundred persons who settled in Kansas, October 8, 1874. They chose the region north of Newton, now the Goessel community\* as their future home and the colony was called New Alexanderwohl. They settled in eight villages clustered about New Alexanderwohl, the villages two to five miles apart and each with a characteristic and poetic name: **Gnadenenthal, Emmenthal, Gnadenfeld, Blumenfeld, Gruenfeld, Hochfeld, Blumenort**, and one with the American name **Springfield**. (Called Spring-

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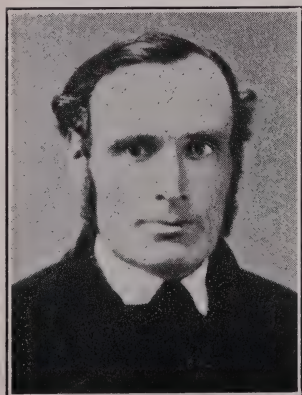
\* In a terrific storm a ship sank in the English Channel. The ship's commander, Captain Goessel, stayed on the bridge until the last passenger was safe but sank with the ship. The community chose this name for their village.





Alexanderwohl Mennonite church located on Highway K-15. The church has a membership of almost one thousand. The membership has spread to the Tabor, Goessel and Lehigh Mennonite churches.

field on account of an abundance of springs.) The **Topeka Commonwealth** reported that from Topeka about eighty families would leave for central Kansas. "It will take about 15 passenger coaches to convey them. They also have sufficient stock to load 30 freight cars and their household goods and agricultural implements will require 12 cars in addition." The land was bought from the Santa Fe and some from homesteaders who were usually anxious to sell after the panic and Grasshopper plague. The group was able to finance its own building program and went about it in a systematic way—contracting with lumber dealers and carpenters and before



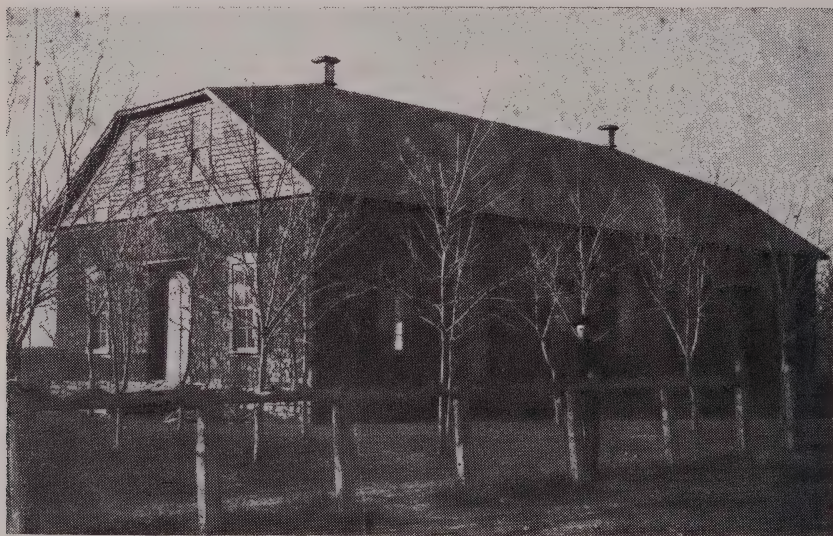
Elder Wilhelm Ewert 1829-1887



Elder Dietrich Gaeddert, 1837-1900

the hardest winter set in, sixty-five families could move into their 20 by 40 feet homes. Their dwelling places were built in villages and the land was divided into narrow strips according to the Russian model. The Santa Fe had built for them two large "immigrant houses," one of which was used for a number of years for worship until a church edifice could be constructed. In 1886 the Alexanderwohl church was erected where it is now located.

The **Teutonia** segment, led by Elder Dietrich Gaeddert, chose to locate about twenty miles west of New Alexanderwohl. When this group came through Illinois, Mennonites from there streamed through the coaches, welcoming the immigrants and passing out food and fruit to the delight of the newcomers. The group was routed to Topeka, Kansas, and housed in the King's Shops, where in a few weeks they were joined by the **Cimbria** group, which first had gone to Lincoln, Nebraska. Gaeddert's party purchased about 35,000 acres railroad land and some homesteads. This group did not attempt the village type of settlement but the Santa Fe had provided an "immigrant house." This structure was first used as living quarters and later as a school and as a place of worship. Under the leadership of Elder Gaeddert the group was organized, February 22, 1875, and the congregation was named **Hoffnungsau Mennonite church**.\* In 1880 the immigrant house was destroyed by a tornado and a roomy adobe church was erected.



Courtesy Mennonite Life

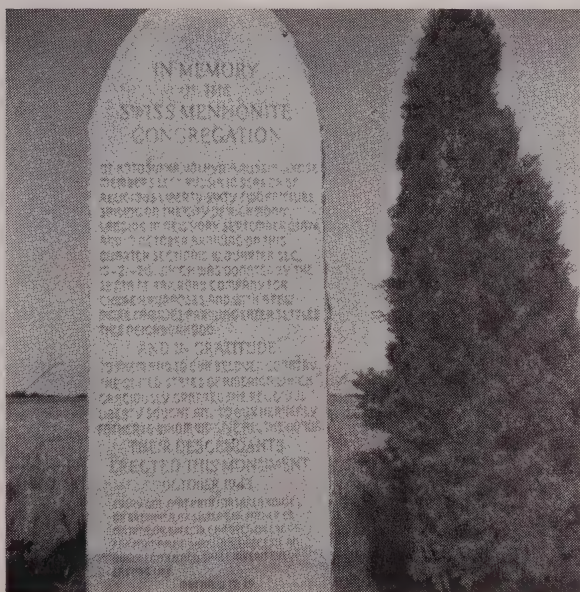
**Hoffnungsau Adobe Church 1880 to 1898.**

\* When in September 1874, a group of land seekers with Elder Gaeddert came to the knoll where today the Buhler Immigration Memorial stands, Elder Gaeddert, his hands akimbo and his feet firmly planted on the ground, looked over the fine terrain extending in all directions and with deep conviction exclaimed: "Dit es je ne waurhaftige Hoffnungsau." (This truly is a hope meadow.) The name was adopted for the church and community.



Almost at the same time another settlement was established in between New Alexanderwohl and Hoffnungsau by Swiss Mennonites, led by Elder Jacob Stucky. This group of sixty-two families had come to Peabody in September 1874, and had remained in town while their men, on foot with spade and hoe, had gone out to select a place to settle. They chose the region in Mound and Turkey townships. The town of Moundridge had not yet been founded: however a small mail station and blacksmith shop, called Christian, were already in existence. While selecting their land a sickness struck nearly all of their children and a number died. The Santa Fe donated land for a church and the group formed the **Hoffnungsfeld Mennonite** congregation. For some time the settlers lived in

### Swiss Mennonite Immigration Memorial

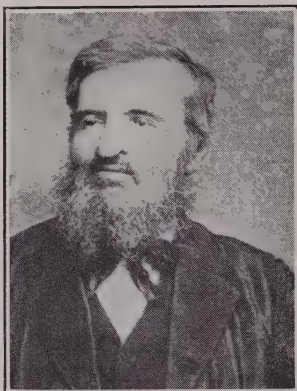


A little west of the Hoffnungsfeld church the third generation of Swiss Mennonite immigrants have erected this marker, stating that the immigrants arrived in 1874 and that the Santa Fe donated the quarter section of land for the building of a church.

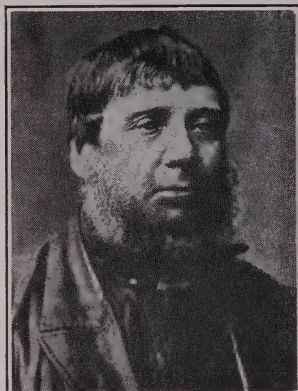
a twenty feet wide and one hundred and twenty feet long immigrant house. The building was used for school and for worship until in 1882 a church was erected. In this region also the **West Zion Mennonite** church was organized and in 1895 a part of the Hoffnungsfeld congregation formed the **Eden Mennonite** church.

A group of immigrants from Ostrog, Poland, arrived late in 1874 and in the spring of 1875 they settled in Canton township in the eastern part of McPherson county. This settlement at first was known as the "**Ostrogers**" and later as the "**Cantoners**" and the **Canton Mennonite** church was organized with Tobias Unruh as leader.





Elder Jacob Stucky  
1824-1893



Elder Tobias Unruh  
1819-1875

Soon Unruh with some of the Ostrog group went to Dakota and a part of the Canton congregation was absorbed by the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.\* In 1878 the **Lone Tree Church of God in Christ** was organized when seventy members were baptized. About six miles north of Moundridge the **Emmanuel Mennonite** church had been organized in 1875, by Mennonites who immigrated from Poland. Until 1931 it was known as the Canton Mennonite church.

East and south of Newton several settlements were made by immigrants from Russia and Prussia. In Newton the **Newton Mennonite** church was organized with the former deputy, Leonard Suderman as leader. Later Jacob Toews from Chiva was chosen to be elder and in 1877, Suderman was elected Elder of the **Emmaus Mennonite** church in Butler county. The church had been organized in 1876 by West Prussian immigrants and in 1878 they erected a church for two hundred people. At Elbing the **Zion Mennonite** church was established in 1883 with J. W. Regier as leader. The community was named Elbing because the settlers came from Elbing, West Prussia. A congregation, led by Elder Johann Schraeder, consisting of about thirty families of Mennonites from Poland, came to the region east of Newton in 1875 and purchased three thousand five hundred acres and formed the **Gnadenberg Mennonite** church now Grace Hill Mennonite church.

About two miles south of Inman the **Bethel Mennonite** church was organized in 1875 with thirty-five members and Jacob Klassen as leader. In 1879, a mile farther west the **Zoar Krimmer Mennonite Brethren** church was established with Jacob Klassen as Elder and Heinrich Toews was elected Elder of the Bethel congregation. Farther west in Rush county a group of about thirty

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\* John Holdeman, the founder of the Church of God in Christ had in the early seventies moved from Wayne County, Ohio, to the Canton region. He came to Kansas with his entire church body consisting of about twenty members.



The more than seventy-year-old Gnadenberg church is dismantled to make room for a modern structure. The building was in use until 1953.

families in 1875, led by A. Hahnhart, organized the **Gnadenenthal Mennonite** church and thirty-five families, of the original Tobias Unruh contingent who had located at Pawnee Rock, in 1875 formed the **Bergthal Mennonite** church.

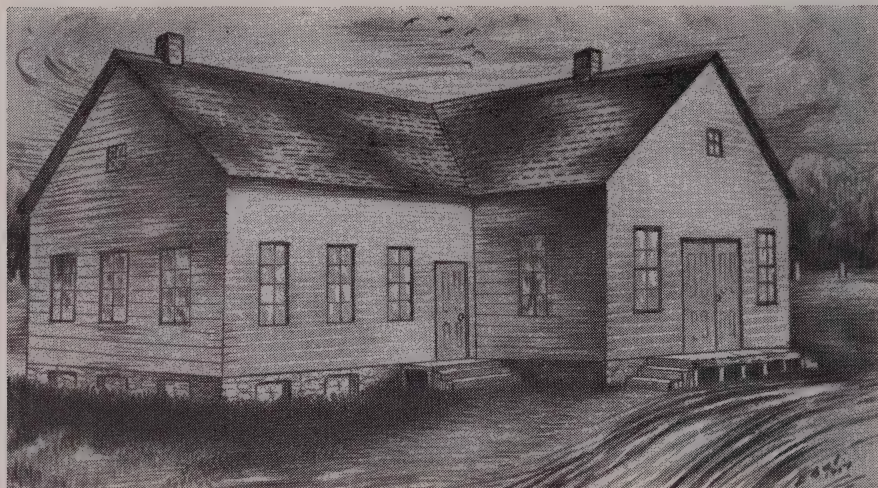
A colony from Poland arrived in 1875, led by Benjamin Unruh. This group settled along the French Creek, a few miles west of the Bruderthal region. The settlement was named **Johannesthal**. When more settlers came, church memberships shifted but in 1882 the Johannesthal Mennonite church was organized. It is located north of Hillsboro on Highway K-15. In Hillsboro, in 1884, the **First Mennonite** church was established with John S. Hirschler as leader.

Two families of Mennonite Brethren had settled near Gnadenau in 1875 and at first attended the Gnadenau church. They would probably have joined the group but in 1876 seventy-five more Mennonite Brethren came from the Saratov district in Russia, near the Volga river, led by Elder Peter Eckert and began to worship in the East Gnadenau public school. At first the group was known as the **Gnadenau Mennonite Brethren** congregation. As a result of the influx from the Volga the Mennonite Brethren group within a year reached one hundred and twenty-five members and the congregation changed its place of worship to the Ebenfeld district and was organized as the **Ebenfeld Mennonite Brethren** church. In 1879, Abraham Cornelsen, one of the first eighteen charter Mennonite Brethren members, became the leader of the Ebenfeld group. For seven years the congregation worshipped in a schoolhouse but in 1883 a church was erected. The building



was twenty-eight feet wide and forty-eight feet long and a year later a twenty-eight foot long wing was added.

Under Elder Cornelsen's leadership\* the church became stable and in 1888 the church membership had reached two hundred and fifty-three. About half of these were of Mennonite descent and half of Lutheran descent. The Ebenfeld group was the first organized Mennonite Brethren congregation in America.



Courtesy A. R. Ebel

A drawing of the Ebenfeld Mennonite Brethren church, 1884.

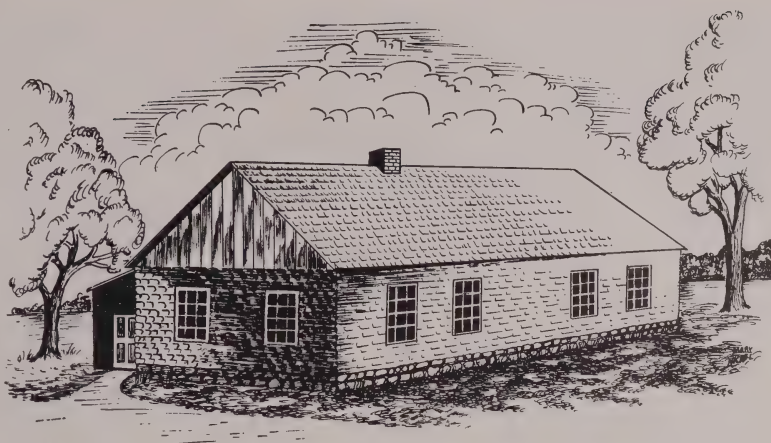
In 1876, nineteen families of Mennonite Brethren came from the Chortitza colony to Marion County but the church relations did not appeal to them and a year later most of these families decided to settle in Woodson county. Soon David Dyck was elected leader of the **Woodson Mennonite Brethren** group. Seven years later a number of these families, Dyck included, moved to Lehigh, Kansas.

Where the counties of McPherson, Harvey, and Reno meet, tracts of land were taken up by members from different churches. One group was the **Hebron Mennonite** church under the leadership of Elder Bernhard Buhler. This group was unique in permitting, and upon request practicing, different forms of baptism. In this region several Mennonite Brethren families also settled in 1874, however, few Brethren came with the first immigrant groups. The majority probably came in 1876 and later. J. H. Lohrenz says: "The total number of Mennonite Brethren coming between 1874 and 1880 has been placed at two hundred families." Three and one half miles east of Buhler the **Ebenezer Mennonite Brethren** church was established with Franz Ediger and Peter Wall as ministers. On July 4, 1879, Elder Abraham Schellenberg came

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\* Abraham Cornelsen had composed the "organization" document in Russia in 1860. He lies buried at the Ebenfeld cemetery.





A drawing of the Ebenezer Mennonite Brethren adobe church erected in 1880 near Buhler, Kansas.

to this community and was elected leader of the Ebenezer group. There were then twenty-six members but by 1888 the membership had reached one hundred and fifty. Elder Schellenberg played an important role in the organization of the Brethren churches in America. The charter of the conference and its first foreign mission work was organized at the Ebenezer church. This church was perhaps the only one in America toward the erection of which the Mennonites in Russia contributed. When on November 5, 1879, the Ebenezer group decided to build a house of worship, the Mennonite Brethren church of Rueckenau, South Russia, con-



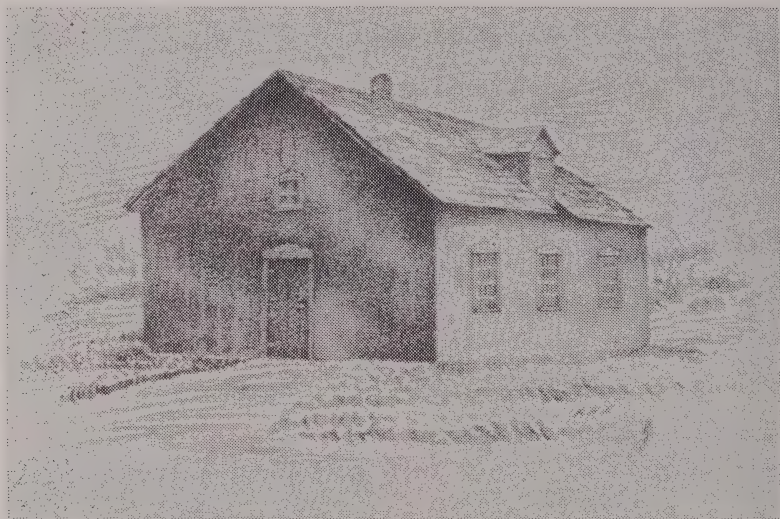
Abraham Schellenberg  
1845-1920



Johann Harms  
1856-1910

tributed two hundred rubles to its building fund. The church was constructed of sun-dried bricks and was thirty feet wide and fifty feet long. It was replaced by a wood frame building in 1900. Later the congregation re-located their church in Buhler, Kansas.

In Marion county some of the French Creek settlers joined the Gnadenau congregation in 1881 and in the same year, Johann Harms, a school teacher and minister, became the leader of a newly organized Brethren group at the French Creek. Soon the group changed its place of worship to a former private school building in Hillsboro and on April 25, 1881, the **Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren** church was organized with thirty-four members and John Harms as leader.



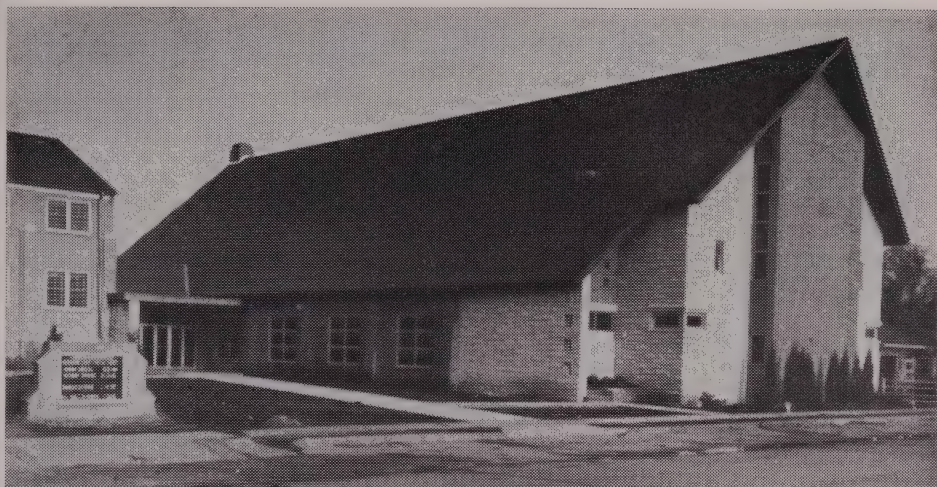
The little Red Schoolhouse church, 1882 to 1890.

In the region where Marion and Harvey county meet a group joined and organized the **Goessel Mennonite Brethren** church in 1880, with Cornelius P. Wedel as Elder. At Lehigh,\* functioning as a branch of Goessel, the **Lehigh Mennonite Brethren** church was established. In 1884 the Lehigh group erected a church building and David Dyck, from Woodson county, became the leader of the group. In between Lehigh and Goessel the **Springfield Krimmer Mennonite Brethren** church was organized in 1894.

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\* The **Marion County Record**, January 14, 1881, reports: "Some wealthy representatives of the celebrated Lehigh colony in Pennsylvania, came out and selected a fine location for a town on the M. & M. branch line (Marion to McPherson) which they went so far as to designate by the beautiful name of **Lehigh**."





The new Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church—Dedicated April 19, 1959

The (Old) Mennonites that had migrated from the eastern states also organized churches. About seven miles southeast of Canton the **Spring Valley Mennonite** church was established with Bishop Brundage as leader. A church was erected on the corner of the Brundage homestead. In 1886 the **Catlin Mennonite** church was erected on a corner of Henry Hornberger's land, northwest of Peabody. The congregation had been organized in 1877 but this group as well as the Spring Valley group at first had their services in schoolhouses.

In 1875 a group of Summerfield, Illinois Mennonites migrated to Halstead. This was done with considerable misgivings. Things looked less attractive now and distances seemed much greater. Elder Christian Krehbiel himself did not yet move but he helped the colony get started. He wrote: "**All illusions disappeared; only our courage and faith in God remained.**" On March 28, 1875, on an Easter Sunday, the **Halstead Mennonite** church was organized with Valentin Krehbiel as leader. This was the first church in Halstead. In 1877 the **Grace Church of God in Christ, Mennonite**, was established near Halstead.

In between Newton and McPherson some of the Summerfield and Iowa Mennonites had bought land among whom were Christian Krehbiel, Christian Voran, Christian Hirschler, and Christian Stucky. It so happened that the corners of the land of three adjoined each other and it was thought that this would make an ideal town site. A town was launched named "Christian" and the **First Mennonite Church of Christian** was organized in 1878 and the church was built on a corner of Christian Krehbiel's land.

For a number of years the immigration movement centered around Halstead. Here Warkentin had built his flouring mill and here David Goerz, in 1875, established the Mennonite monthly, **Zur Heimat**. This paper was published in the interest of the im-



migrants and is said to have carried more sailing notices and ship and railroad ticket prices than the New York dailies. Halstead also became the seat of the Halstead seminary, the first institution of higher learning among the immigrants.

As the immigrants in Kansas, so also the settlers that went to other stations and in Canada, were not slow in establishing churches. Their locating at different places was a good thing as Elder Christian Krehbiel points out:

It was to be expected that they would rapidly multiply and, had they all settled in one colony, they could not have expanded as they have. Also had they all been established in one region their religious activities would have exercised less influence. Living to themselves in a closed community they would have had fewer contacts with the outside world, their own horizons would have been narrower and in consequence their influence on outsiders would have been the less. The outside world in turn, with its manifold superiorities and advantages in certain respects might have exercised a repressive effect on them, not possible in their dispersion. And higher schools for advanced education and the missionary spirit would hardly have found the interest and support that they have enjoyed.

The largest number of churches established in the Midwest were of the General Conference of Mennonites. In 1877, ten Kansas congregations organized themselves as the Kansas conference. Other churches joined them and by 1889 about twenty Kansas, Dakota, Minnesota, and Nebraska churches had joined the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America.

In 1878 the Mennonite Brethren churches made an attempt to form a conference but the first duly constituted group did not meet until 1879, when the Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota congregations were represented at Henderson, Nebraska with twenty-two delegates. When the conference expanded, provisions were made for annual District Conferences and for a General Conference to meet once in three years. The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren established churches in Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota and in Canada, and in 1880 effected a conference organization. The Peters' church in Nebraska and the Wall's church in Minnesota established more churches in the states and in Canada and in 1889



Buhler Immigration Memorial

## Mennonite Churches in Central Kansas



## CHAPTER XII

### The Immigrants Establish Higher Schools

*Teaching them to observe all things—Christ*

Many of the Anabaptist leaders, such as Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock, and Menno Simons were university trained men. After some years, because of persecutions, these educated men were gone and for several hundred years there were few educated men among the Mennonites.

When Harvard College, the first college in America, was founded in 1663, it was established:

**"To advance Learning and to perpetuate it to Posterity dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches when our present ministers shall lie in the dust."**

For a period of one hundred and fifty years every American college was founded by one church or another. Some far-sighted men in Mennonite circles also realized the imperative need of such institutions.

In 1735 the Mennonites in Holland established a seminary in connection with the university of Amsterdam. In Russia it took until 1845 before steps were taken to provide for some advanced education. In 1867 the Mennonites in Germany started a higher school at Weierhof and two years later an advanced school was started in France. The need for higher education among Mennonites was great and gradually it gained ground in Europe. By the time the Mennonites left Russia there were advanced schools in many villages.



Christopher Dock



The Mennonites which had fled from Switzerland, Germany, and Holland directly to America, also had established higher schools. In 1702 a school was started in Germantown by Mennonites and Friends. Pastorius, an outstanding teacher taught here. In 1714, Christopher Dock, one of America's foremost educators and a Mennonite, taught in Pennsylvania and the first book on education in America, published in 1770, was written by him. This school-dedicated man was found dead on his knees in his classroom.\*

In 1868 the Mennonites in America established a school at Wadsworth, Ohio. C. J. van der Smitten was called from Germany to head the theology department and he believed the school should function as a seminary. Others preferred a preparatory program. During its ten years of operation a constituency of only 1,400 members contributed \$30,000. Although the school never prospered it made substantial contributions in preparing leaders for higher education movements.

When the immigrations took place each group found itself confronted with the advanced education problem. Some were much opposed to all such efforts. Some were unconcerned or neutral. Some felt the need keenly. With the great majority of immigrants higher education was a dilemma. They believed in elementary and Bible schooling but they feared greatly the influences of high schools, colleges, and universities. Slowly in one group after another the conviction grew that higher schools are essential for survival. Often only after heavy losses had occurred.

As early as 1877, Elder Wilhelm Ewert in an address stated the attitude of school minded church leaders on higher education. He said:

**If educational matters among the Mennonites had been given the attention they deserve in the past, the denomination would not be so badly divided. There would be better understanding of, and more respect for each other among individual churches. There would be more real life and more activity in the Kingdom of God. True and thorough education and a knowledge of God are not contradictory. The study of nature leads to a greater appreciation of the power and wisdom of God: it can teach us the existence of an almighty, wise, and loving God. The attitude of the Christian towards education should never be one of indifference or opposition, but rather an eagerness to acquire these treasures of knowledge and use them in the furtherance of the Kingdom of God!**

Among the immigrants, Peter Balzer's small private school in the South Blumenthal village was destined to become the nucleus of higher education. It began in 1878 by taking in advanced pupils to train them for the teaching profession. Some he took in board and they slept in the school's attic. The aim of the school was: **To train teachers far enough to teach a district school and to give instruction in the German language and in religion so that in the future the churches for their spiritual need may find trained help.**

The second venture was the Emmenthal village Continuation School, opened in the fall of 1882 with H. H. Ewert and H. R. Voth

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\* P. M. Friesen states that Christopher Dock has been called the "American Pestalozzi" because he promoted such significant didactic and pedagogical ideas and rules.



Peter Balzer's Private School

as teachers. It, too, soon proved inadequate and on September 19, 1883, the Halstead Seminary was opened at Halstead. There were only fifteen students present at the opening but the rooms were soon filled. From 1884 on girls were tentatively admitted as students. In the spring of 1893 the Halstead Seminary, after ten years of activity, came to a close and was merged into Bethel College.

The agitation for, and the erection of Bethel College and Academy, marked the beginning of definite steps in regard to college education. More and more felt the need of trained teachers for elementary and preparatory schools, and for trained church and mission workers.

Bethel College opened its doors September 20, 1893. The cornerstone of the administration building had been laid October 12, 1888 but due to many difficulties the completion of the building was delayed for almost five years. School leaders worked untiringly until the venture finally materialized. For a time only Academy and Bible courses were offered but in 1912 the first Bachelor of Arts degree was granted and since then each year a good number of students have graduated with Bachelor and other degrees. One building after another has been added to the original administration building.

Bethel College was established to provide the facilities for a Christian higher education for the young people of the Mennonite churches and others. The Bethel Corporation of the Mennonite Church of North America owns and controls the school. To meet historic Mennonite interests and needs, courses are offered in liberal arts and sciences, religion, music, and other departments. Bethel is a fully accredited four-year college. Many important

## BETHEL COLLEGE, NORTH NEWTON, KANSAS



The Administration Building erected in 1888 to 1893.

historical Mennonite documents have been gathered by Bethel College and are preserved in its archives.

In the Mennonite Brethren circles the need for a higher institution of learning had frequently been discussed. At the invitation of the Board of McPherson College the Mennonite Brethren group opened a German Department in McPherson College in 1898 which was discontinued after seven years of operation.\* Although abandoned, the venture proved fruitful in arousing interest for higher education and in supplying leaders for later educational movements in the conference and in its closely related Krimmer Mennonite Brethren conference.

After three years of waiting a Tabor College Corporation was formed and a building was erected at Hillsboro, Kansas. The school opened its doors September 5, 1908. Before the end of the first school year the enrollment had reached 104 students. During the first ten years the school was housed in a three story wood building which was completely destroyed by fire, April 30, 1918. Ruins of the building were immediately cleared and during the following years new buildings were constructed.

Since 1935, Tabor College is owned, operated, and controlled by the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America. The school emphasizes Christian training for leadership in the church, in school, and in the community and offers instruction

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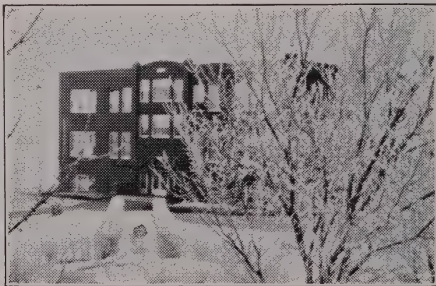
\* The main reason for discontinuing the venture probably was because a few of the teachers in the college taught evolution doctrines not in harmony with the Mennonite Brethren faith.



**TABOR COLLEGE, HILLSBORO, KANSAS**

in liberal arts and sciences, Bible, music, and related subjects. Since 1955 the Mennonite Brethren conference has launched a budgeted giving plan which is to make more buildings available and lead to the full accreditation of the institution. A modern library was constructed in 1957.

A third Mennonite institution of higher learning in Kansas is the Hesston College and Bible School maintained by the Mennonite (Old) Church. This school is under the control of the Mennonite Board of Education. Agitation for the establishment of a church school in the middle west was begun in 1907 and on September 22, 1909, the school opened its doors for the first school year.

**HESSTON COLLEGE, HESSTON, KANSAS**

Left, First Administration Building (now Ladies' Dormitory); Right, present Administration Building

During its first years the school offered academy and Bible instruction but in 1945 the Junior College was organized on the four-year-plan—the junior and senior years of the traditional high school and the freshman and sophomore years of college. In 1949,

Hesston College began to offer a four-year Bible course. The institution offers courses in liberal arts and sciences and stresses the enrichment of spiritual, social, physical, and intellectual life. The Junior College work is fully accredited.

In order to supply the churches with trained leaders, the establishment of seminaries had been advocated for many years. In 1945 the General Conference Mennonite Church opened the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Chicago. It was affiliated with the Bethany Biblical Seminary of the Church of the Brethren. In 1958 the seminary moved to a new campus at Elkhart, Indiana, where it began operating as a full seminary. It is now affiliated with the Goshen College Biblical Seminary, operating under a plan of co-operation called the Associated Biblical Seminaries.

The first theological seminary in the Mennonite Brethren Church was opened at Fresno, California, in 1955 as the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary.\* It offers a three-year theological training leading to the B. D. degree. In Canada two colleges also offer advanced Bible instruction. The Mennonite Brethren Bible College at Winnipeg, Manitoba, was established in 1944, and offers a four-year Bible college program. The General Conference Canadian Mennonite Bible College at Winnipeg, Manitoba, was founded in 1947 and also offers a four-year course. At Omaha, Nebraska, the Grace Bible Institute was established in 1943. It operates as an Inter-Mennonite four-year Bible college. At Fresno, California, the Mennonite Brethren church operates the Pacific Bible Institute and Junior College. It was founded in 1944.

In central Kansas, in a radius of less than twenty-five miles there are five church supported colleges. McPherson College (Dunkard) and Central College (Free Methodist) are both located in McPherson. Although not of Mennonite origin they are in doctrine closely related to the Mennonite faith. Hesston College is supported and controlled by Mennonites who first settled in the eastern states and then from there migrated to the middle west. Tabor College is supported by the constituencies of the Mennonite Brethren conferences. Bethel College is maintained by the Western and Pacific District conferences. Besides these institutions of higher learning, Mennonites maintain colleges and seminaries in eastern states, on the Pacific coast, and in Canada. They also maintain many academies and Bible schools—three in Kansas\*\*

All of these institutions are voluntarily supported and have had to struggle for existence. Often it has been difficult to meet educational standards and to provide financial needs but their educational products have compared well with other colleges.\*\*\* The lack of interest in education has sometimes been exceedingly dis-

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\* It should be noted that before these institutions were opened the Witmarsum Theological Seminary served the General Conference Mennonite Church as a seminary and Tabor College offered seminary training in the Mennonite Brethren constituency.

\*\* The Central Kansas Academy, Hutchinson, Kansas. The Berean Bible School, Elbing, Kansas. The Meade Bible School and Academy, Meade, Kansas.

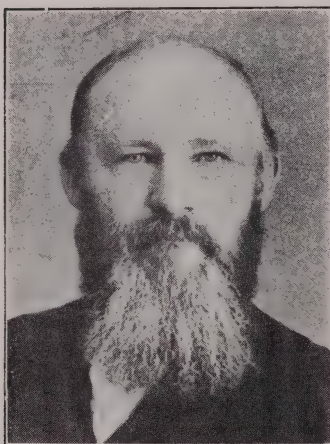
\*\*\* See **Mennonite Colleges in Kansas**, by D. V. Wiebe, Kansas University.

couraging to school leaders. In the early nineties one wrote: "At this time interest in education was at an exceedingly low ebb. Only here and there could a friend of education be found."<sup>3</sup> Yet, far sighted men with vision and courage have made higher education among the settlers a reality and if this and future generations accept the challenge it may rightly be said:

"Surely the Mennonites have a passion for schools and education."<sup>4</sup>

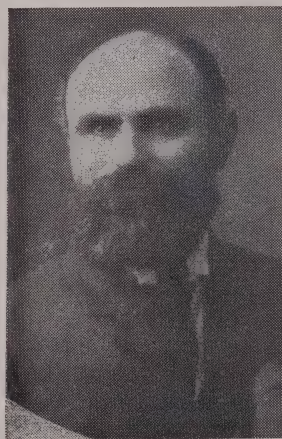
Educational standards and costs are constantly rising and needs become increasingly greater. Obviously there is too much division and overlapping in educational efforts among the Mennonites as a whole and within each conference group. The demands and the trends of the day seem to point to strong, centralized and specialized institutions.

### PIONEER EDUCATORS



Gerhard Wieler

Taught the first six years at the Hoffnungsthal school. Later became principal of the Lehigh school. Taught school more than fifty years.



John F. Duerksen

Spearheaded higher education in Mennonite Brethren circles. Head of the German Department at McPherson College 1898 to 1905.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### The Immigrants Establish Welfare Institutions

*For it pleased them to make a certain contribution to the poor—Paul*

As an expression of their faith and as a positive witness to their peace convictions, the immigrants have engaged in various types of welfare work. These activities were carried on voluntarily and usually sponsored and supervised by the church.

With the Goessel community as the center, there are today within a radius of less than twenty-five miles, five church supported Mennonite hospitals and six Mennonite homes for the aged. Promoted by Christian Krehbiel and his group, an Indian Industrial School was started at Halstead in 1885. In 1887 this school was taken to Elder Krehbiel's farm near Halstead. In 1893 a Mennonite Orphan and Children Aid Society was organized at Halstead and help was given to Indian youths and to orphans in Germany, Russia, and Canada. The first welfare institution established by an immigrant group was the orphanage near the Gnadenau village, two miles southeast of Hillsboro. This institution



The Orphanage near Gnadenau

had its beginning in a wooden building in 1890 and was sponsored mainly by the Gnadenau group. In 1893 a four-story stone structure was erected. After a number of years the institution was converted into the Salem Home for the Ill and Aged.

In 1898 the Bethesda Hospital and Home for the Aged was established at Goessel. This was a united effort and sponsored by the local churches of three Mennonite conferences. Soon a



Bethesda Home for the Aged

second building was added and the institution has continued to serve the community.

In 1906 the Bethel Deaconess Hospital was established at Newton under the auspices of the General Conference of the Mennonite church. In 1917 the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren churches erected the Salem Hospital at Hillsboro.\* The General Conference of Mennonite churches founded the Bethel Home for the Aged in 1925 at Newton and on October 16, 1929, the Bethesda Hospital Association opened a new modern brick hospital at Goessel.

As a result of the world-wide depression years, followed by World War II, few welfare institutions were established during a twenty-five year period. Land, livestock, grain, and produce prices had dropped sharply during the thirties and the Mennonite communities could do little more than maintain the institutions already established. During World War II, the financial resources of the Mennonites were taxed in a new area. In lieu of military service the government permitted the historic peace churches to have Civilian Public Service camps and thousands of young Mennonites have served the government without pay—many as much as four years. Many thousands of dollars were contributed by the churches for such projects. The cost was about fifty cents per church member per month to finance this peace witness.

In more recent years the Sunshine Mission Home at Buhler and the Home for the Aged at Inman have been established and several hospitals have been founded. In 1944, the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, group erected the Mercy Hospital at Moundridge. In 1954, under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee the Prairie View Hospital, an institution for

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\* The Salem Hospital was completed before World War I ended. A letter published in the Topeka Capital, September 20, 1918, written by the secretary of the Hospital Board states: "We understand that hospitals are offering rooms and nurses care for sick and wounded soldiers. We have built a hospital here at Hillsboro and would like to offer for that purpose a number of rooms. We desire to do this as a patriotic duty and shall care for the soldiers and furnish rooms free." Governor Capper wrote a letter of appreciation and stated that the offer would be referred to the Surgeon General.

mental illness, was established at Newton. An Assembly, representing all the churches of the Hillsboro community erected the new Salem Hospital in 1956. As soon as the hospital was occupied the former Salem Hospital and Annex were remodeled and in 1957 the institution began to operate as the Salem Hospital and Home for the Aged, Inc. The most recent welfare institution is the Moundridge Memorial Home for the Aged, erected in 1958, near Moundridge.



Courtesy Mennonite Life

Flour for Relief from the Middle West

As a positive witness to their peace testimony the Mennonite churches under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee gather and distribute annually food and clothing and carry on food and meat "canning" projects for needy people regardless of race, creed, or color. All of this is done voluntarily "In the Name of Christ."



Mennonite Central Committee emblem



## CHAPTER XIV

### Immigration to Canada

and

### New Settlements in the United States and Canada

*Thou shalt spread abroad to the west, . . . and to the north*

About 18,000 Mennonites migrated from Europe to America and of these immigrants some 8,000 settled in the Dominion of Canada. The immigrants to Canada were all of Russian nationality, of Dutch descent, and all settled in the Province of Manitoba. Their language was Low-German but they used the High-German for school and for church services. Only a few could speak a little Russian and hardly anyone spoke English. Nearly all came from the Chortitza colonies in South Russia and they found in Manitoba a hearty welcome, religious freedom, and vast acres of low priced but productive land. They chose Canada for six reasons: (1) Canada promised the colonizers complete military exemptions. (2) They were promised complete control of their schools and churches. (3) They preferred to live under a monarchical form of government. (4) They were given a free grant of land and a grant of thirty dollars per person for passage money. (5) They were promised that they could retain the German language for their schools. (6) The vast stretches of uninhabited land appealed to them. Here they would be able to live free from outside influences but with room for expansion.

More than two hundred and thirty families settled in Manitoba in 1874. The first group to arrive was the Kleine Gemeinde contingent of one hundred families, led by their deputies Cornelius Toevs and David Klassen. They came from Borsenko, a settlement that had been established as late as 1865, west of Chortitza. They arrived on an **Allen** line steamer at Montreal, and came to Ontario, July 19, 1874. The Canadian agent, Jacob E. Klotz, met the contingent at Bremen, Germany and tactfully steered them to Canada. At Toronto the immigrants were met by the Canadian Mennonite, Jacob Y. Schantz, and supplied with provisions for the rest of the journey to Niverville,\* Manitoba. Here the government had reserved eight townships for them and an "immigrant house" had been constructed for temporary quarters.

The Bergthal colony, consisting of about three thousand persons, had decided to emigrate. This colony had been established in 1836 as the first daughter colony of Chortitza. Their settlement was located 130 miles east of Chortitza and had consisted of five villages. They had great difficulty in disposing of their properties

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\* Niverville was at first called **Hespeler** in honor of the Canadian Immigration Agent, William Hespeler.

and were finally forced to leave in three contingents, each a year apart. Nevertheless, this emigration venture is thought to have been the most orderly and unified of all. Their Elder, Gerhard Wiebe, said: "In all history he does not believe that there is another instance where there was such complete unanimity and harmony in everything taken up as in this colony."

The first Bergthal contingent, and according to some reports the first group to arrive in Manitoba, consisted of about eight hundred persons and arrived on the *S. S. Novia Scotia* at Quebec, in late July. This group too, had been met in Germany by the Canadian Klotz and helpfully directed to Canada. The *St. Paul Daily Express*, August 6, 1874, stated that, "the longest train ever passed over the Northern Pacific railroad had arrived from Duluth with five hundred and ninety-five Mennonite immigrants and that they had left for Manitoba on the *Cheyenne*." The group is reported to have arrived at Winnipeg, a town of about three thousand, July 31, 1874, on the steamer *International*. From here



they proceeded by boat twenty-five miles south and established their homes on the East Reserve. By 1876, all the property of the Bergthal colony in Russia had been disposed of and the last of the five hundred families arrived in America.

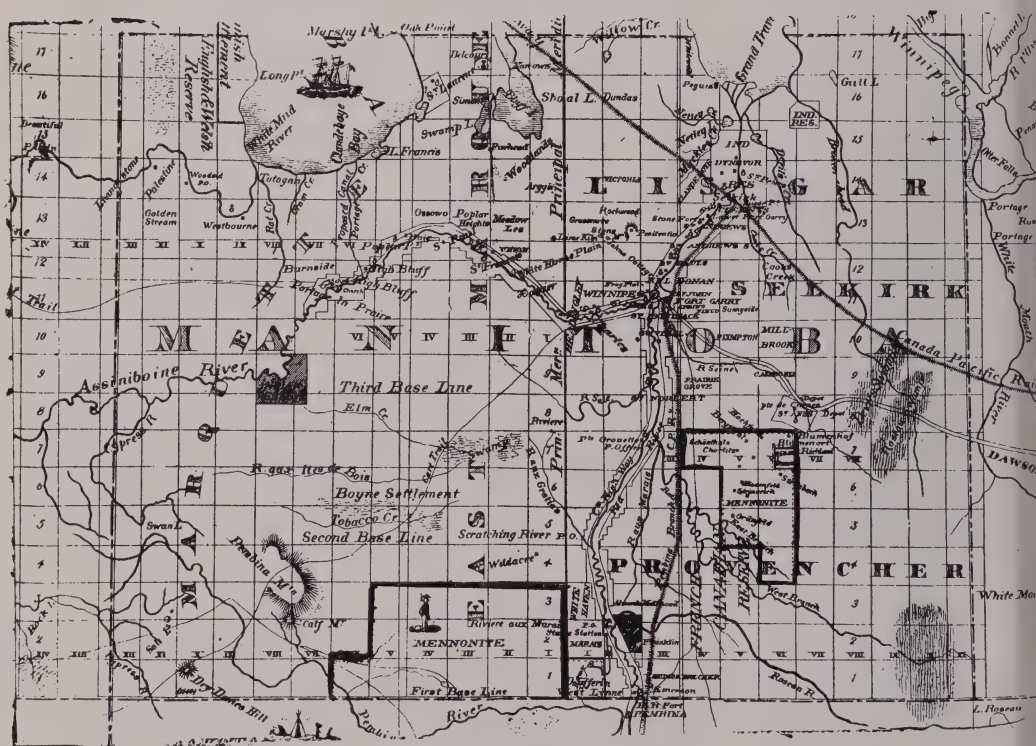
The newcomers were warmly welcomed to Canada. The *Winnipeg Free Press* wrote: "The people who make up this traveling party seem just suited to the life of a pioneer. The town was unusually lively during their stay here. Stores, especially hardware stores, agencies where machinery was sold, and grocery stores were practically besieged. They seem to have plenty of money, yet they are very thrifty. They are inclined to haggle and will try to get a reduction on prices, even if it were only five cents on a fifty dollar purchase. The shoppers were seen going back and forth all



day, carrying forks, scythes, coffee mills, frying pans, cooking utensils, groceries, and many other things which they would require as pioneers."<sup>1</sup> The immigrants had sold their property on time and had little money to begin their farming operations, but the Canadian government loaned them \$96,000, the repayment of the loan guaranteed by the Canadian Mennonites.<sup>2</sup> Eventually the debt was paid in full by the immigrants.\*

A second group of Bergthal immigrants arrived at Quebec, in October, 1874, but stayed with the Ontario Mennonites during the winter and in spring joined the Manitoba settlement. Of the first Canada settlers, thirty Kleine Gemeinde families soon decided to change to a warmer climate and went to Jansen, Nebraska and some Bergthal families migrated to Butterfield, Minnesota but more immigrants continued to arrive in Canada.

Map of East and West Reserve in Manitoba

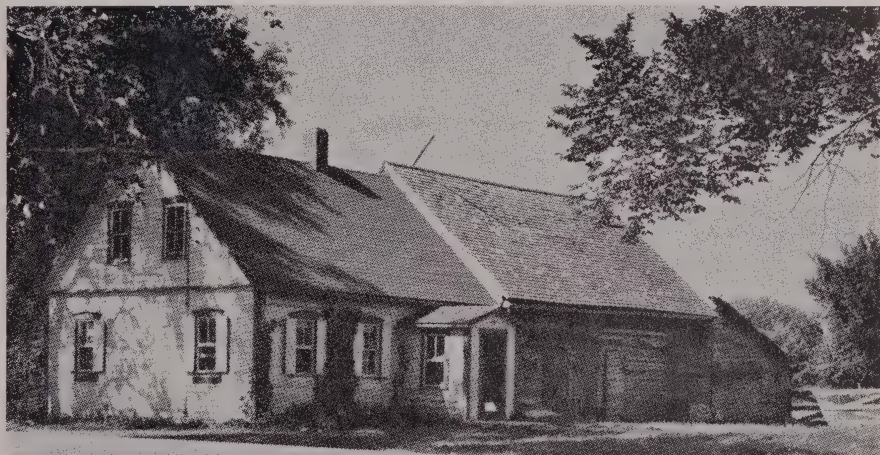


\* Government officials reported that within one week after settling, the Mennonites were selling butter on Canadian markets. Lord Dufferin, the King's representative in Canada, visited the colonies in 1877 and reported: "This country, that has seen so many changes and so much progress in so short a time, has never witnessed a greater transformation than this."



The Fuerstenland colony, a rather conservative group, numbering about eleven hundred persons, decided to emigrate to Canada. This colony had been established in Russia in 1864 as a Chortitza daughter colony. It consisted of six villages—their land having been purchased from the Grand Duke Michael. The Fuerstenlanders, later called **Old Colonists**, came in 1875, and started a new settlement west of the Red River known as the “Western Reserve” while the Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthal settlement east of the Red River was known as the “East Reserve.” All this land had been set aside by the Canadian government for Mennonite colonizers. The East Reserve, lying southeast of Winnipeg, consisted of eight townships; the Western Reserve consisted of seventeen townships. Soon a segment of the Bergthal group moved to the Western Reserve and became known as the **Sommerfeld Mennonites**.

### A Pioneer Steinbach, Manitoba, home



One of the original Mennonite homes still standing in the Steinbach District, East Reserve. The house and barn are joined. By 1880 there were 54 villages in the East Reserve. Steinbach soon became the hub of the settlements. From eighteen families, who settled in the Steinbach village in 1874, the community has grown to a town of almost 3,000.

On July 15, 1875, the **S. S. Quebec** brought four hundred and sixty persons to Canada. More arrived and it is estimated that in 1875 more than four thousand immigrants came to Canada. In 1876 the number dropped to one thousand three hundred and forty-nine and in 1877 Manitoba is reported to have received only one hundred and eighty-five settlers. In 1878 the number was three hundred and twenty-three persons and in 1879, two hundred and forty-eight persons. After 1879 there were only a few arrivals and in 1880 the immigration virtually ceased.

The Mennonite immigrations to Canada proved to be of monumental importance. The colonizers were honest, frugal, and in-

dustrious and did much to aid the agricultural development of Manitoba. The immigrants built up well-ordered farms, established schools, churches, hospitals, homes for the aged, and a home for mentally ill. They expanded to other provinces and have made notable contributions in farming, education, industries, and in welfare work. When the immigration period ended there were but few Mennonite immigrants to Canada for a period of about forty years until in 1923 a much larger influx of Mennonite immigrants from Europe to Canada took place.

### The Great Mennonite Immigrations to Canada, 1923-1929

It is a startling fact that during the six-year period beginning with 1923, more Mennonite immigrants came from Russia to Canada than the total number of immigrants that had come from Europe to America during the first period of mass migrations. The total number of the earlier period numbered about 18,000; the influx to Canada alone during the six-year period beginning with 1923 amounted to 21,000. This influx to Canada took place comparatively quietly but rapidly and the Canadian Mennonites and Canadian government deserve more credit for making it possible for the unusually large number of immigrants to establish themselves in Canada. When other countries refused these unfortunate refugees entry, Canada opened its doors and the Canadian Mennonite churches largely shouldered the burdens.

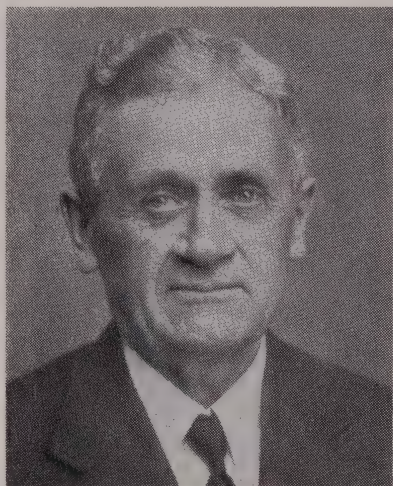
The cause of the migration of more than 21,000 Mennonites from Russia to Canada was the Bolshevik Revolution. This mighty upheaval deprived the Mennonites in Russia of their property rights, their religious freedom, and their churches. Upon urgent appeals to permit the Mennonites to immigrate, Canada finally opened its doors, subject to three conditions: (1) The immigrant must settle on the land; (2) He must be guaranteed not to become a burden to the state. (3) Each immigrant must pass a rigorous health test.

To aid and regulate the immigration movement a **Canadian Board of Colonization** was formed with David Toews as president and chief promoter. The Canadian Pacific Railway Company agreed to finance the enterprise, provided the Colonization Board would underwrite the transportation expenses. The repayment of the debt proved difficult. For a number of years both the immigrants and the churches wrestled with the "Reiseschuld" (traveling debt) but eventually, the immigrants, together with the help of the Mennonite churches, have paid in full the total debt to the railroad company, amounting to the huge sum of two million dollars. Today the more than twenty-one thousand immigrants and their descendants are distributed among the hundreds of Mennonite settlements in the Provinces of Canada; mainly in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. They have built farms, schools, churches, and colleges, and have proven themselves an asset to the Canadian Mennonite circles as well as to agriculture and industry. The escape of these thousands of Menno-



nites from the terrors of famine and revolution is an epic in Mennonite annals perhaps unsurpassed anywhere in history. The Mennonite population in Canada has increased rapidly. In 1951 the total baptized Mennonite church membership in Canada had reached 40,120 members but this did not include the children nor non-church people of Mennonite descent.

### Canadian Immigration Leaders



Elder David Toews, 1870-1947  
Rosthern, Saskatchewan



Cornelius F. Klassen, 1894-1954  
Abbotsford, British Columbia

Toews worked unstintingly to aid the Mennonite immigrants in Canada. On his own initiative he signed the contract with the C. P. R. railroad. As a child he was in the ill-fated Khiva expedition, then came to Kansas, and later migrated to Canada. For twenty-four years he was chairman of the Canadian Board of Colonization. — Klassen served as Administrator of the Relief and Colonization work in Russia, Canada, and Europe. In 1930 he became the leader of liquidating the over \$2,000,000 transportation debt. From 1945 on he was European Commissioner for Refugee Aid and Resettlement work. He died while on a mission in Europe.

### New Settlements in the United States

At about 1890 a widespread migration of Mennonites began southward into Oklahoma and Texas, northward to North Dakota, Montana, and Saskatchewan, and westward to Colorado, Idaho, and the Pacific states. The new colonies at first were small and far-flung but in time grew in importance—in fact becoming as strong as their mother settlements.

In the "Cherokee Run" in 1889 many acres of Oklahoma land were thrown open to white settlers and thousands rushed in and took up land. Soon Mennonite settlers from Kansas and other districts moved to the "Sooner State." The original settlements in the midwest had become crowded and land prices had risen



sharply and many young farmers looked for new opportunities. Many migrated to Oklahoma, western Kansas, and eastern Colorado. From Minnesota a group changed to Montana and from the central states some went to North Dakota and to Canada. In 1906 a settlement began at Aberdeen, Idaho.

Of equal importance were the migrations to the West Coast. The development of the "West" had its beginning during the gold-rush days. No one thought of California as a farming country. General Freemont recorded in 1846: "Much of the land is a barren, worthless waste." By 1860 the gold strike was exhausted and many of the gold seekers were forced to turn to farming. They found that by hard work and irrigation, barren wasteland could be transformed into productive farmland. Soon Mennonites were attracted



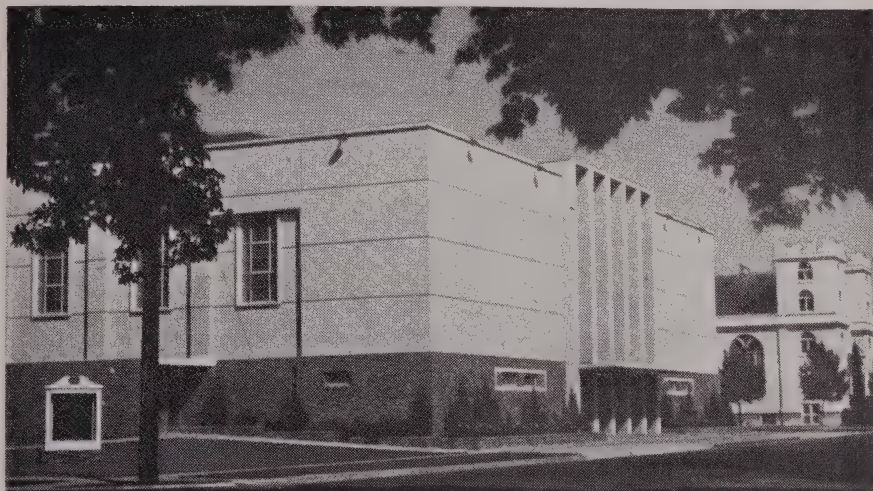
A Field of Thompson Grapes in the Reedley District

to the West by the pleasant climate and farming opportunities. The first Mennonite church organized in California was established near Paso Robles in 1897.

The development of the San Joaquin Valley is of special significance because many Mennonites located in this region. The first Mennonite settler came to Reedley in 1902—soon to be followed by others from Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Dakota, and Minnesota. The pioneers found farming much different from the midwest. The land had to be leveled, fertilized, planted, and irrigated, but it produced bountifully. Eventually the Reedley-Dinuba region has become known as the "fruit basket of the nation." On June 12, 1905, the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church was organized and in 1906 the Reedley First Mennonite Church. In 1910, John Z. Kleinassser and nine other families from Yale, South Dakota, settled south of Dinuba and established the Zion Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. The favorable climate, good yields, and good prices induced many to join the settlements.

The second large settlement in the San Joaquin valley is northwest of Bakersfield. This region was a parched desert until irri-

### An Example of Mennonite Expansion



Mennonite Brethren Church, Reedley, California

This is probably the largest Mennonite church in America, with a membership of about 1,400 and a seating capacity of 2,000. Until 1902 there was not a single Mennonite in the Fresno-Reedley-Dinuba region. Today there are, besides the above church: the Reedley First Mennonite, the Grace Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, the Dinuba Mennonite Brethren, the Zion Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, the Fresno Mennonite Brethren, the Fresno Mennonite, and the Fresno Butler Avenue Mennonite Brethren churches. Besides these a number of Mennonite Mission and extension churches.

gation was practiced. The Rosedale, Shafter, and Wasco districts have become noted alfalfa, potato, and cotton centers. The first settlers in this region attempted to start a new project called "Martensdale" and most of them came from the midwest. One example: the G. G. Nickel family had lived at Hillsboro, Kansas but in 1893, during the Cherokee Run had moved to Fairview, Oklahoma and from there in 1909, to Martensdale, near Bakersfield. The venture soon collapsed—some like the Nickel family moving to Reedley—some to other places in California—some returning to their former homes in the midwest. In 1917, Albert Nikkel came from Escondido to Shafter and soon J. J. and G. J. Siemens and Nicolai Neufeld also began farming in the Shafter region.\* In 1920, Simon Peters arrived from Waldheim, Saskatchewan and became a pioneer potato grower, beginning with a five-acre tract. Today there is a Mennonite church in Shafter and there are four Mennonite Brethren churches in this region; one each at Bakersfield, Rosedale, Shafter, and Wasco.

Some of the West Coast pioneers found the beginning very difficult, in fact gave up the venture, blaming their failure on new settlement promoters such as H. J. Martens and other land agents.

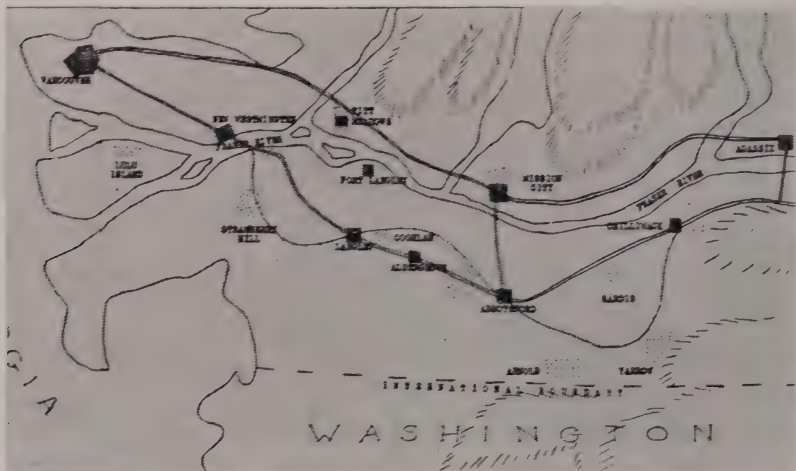
\* Vernon Neufeld, *Mennonite Life*, October, 1952.



Later developments, however, have shown that promoters were basically correct when they claimed that the barren tracts could be transformed into "little gold mines" and that this was indeed the "land of milk and honey." As a result of the miracle of irrigation, fertilizer, and scientific farming, the barren lands of the counties of Kern, Tulare, Fresno, and farther north, have been transformed into an agricultural empire, probably unequalled anywhere in the world. The Mennonite population in California has reached more than six thousand with twenty-six or more well established churches, several higher schools, hospitals and homes for the aged. There are also a number of prosperous Mennonite settlements in each of the states of Oregon and Washington with well established churches. The farmers in these states practice dairying, fruit raising, and grain farming.

### Migrations to the Fraser Valley

British Columbia, the most westerly province of Canada, has attracted some fifteen thousand Mennonites since 1927. The southwestern region of this province has a moderate climate and has become a favorite spot among land seekers, especially those of the "prairie" provinces of Canada. The mighty Fraser river flows almost near the southern boundary into the Pacific ocean. The climate of southwest British Columbia is mild, the rainfall abundant, and the soil is fertile. Thriving cities and small towns dot the valleys and hills. Large acreages of the valley were formerly lakes, marshes, and woodlands but the land has been cleared, diked, and drained and is now rich grass, grain, fruit, or dairy land. The migration of the Mennonites to this region has become a migration phenomenon in Mennonite history. Thousands of home seekers have peacefully invaded this territory and have established their homes here.



The Fraser Valley in British Columbia



Many of the settlers that came from the eastern prairie provinces had but recently come to Canada from Russia. Some of the settlers had first gone to Mexico and from there came to British Columbia. The Mennonite settlements follow the Fraser river east and west from Rosedale to Vancouver, a distance of about one hundred miles. Yarrow was the first Mennonite settlement and today the village town numbers about two thousand. Large settlements are at Chilliwack, Sardis, Greendale, Yarrow, Arnold, Abbotsford, Clearbrook, Matsqui, and Vancouver.



First Dwelling at Yarrow, B. C.

There are four Mennonite branches represented in the Fraser valley: Twelve Mennonite Brethren churches; ten General Conference churches; one Evangelical Mennonite Brethren church, and one Church of God in Christ Mennonite church. The settlers live in closely knit units which are ideal for church and school.

Two major economic crises have threatened the welfare of the settlements: (1) The collapse of the "berry" market as a result of an aftermath of the loss of markets subsequent to World War II. (2) The inundation of large sections of the Fraser valley when in the spring of 1948 the dikes broke. Much good farm land was inundated—some to a depth of eight feet, and had to be drained, resown and replanted. With a great deal of courage both catastrophies were overcome. New systems of fruit growing, acreage control, and fruit marketing were introduced and immediately after the flood the dikes were raised and strengthened to eliminate, if possible, the recurrence of a flood.

The British Columbia settlements are landmarks of unprecedented growth. The Mennonite settlers have shown much interest in education and schools and in church activities. There are several Mennonite homes for the aged in the valley and a number of church schools and Christian high schools. The largest church-supported school is the Mennonite Educational Institute at Clearbrook. This institution is under the supervision of seven Menno-



nite churches of different denominations and has an enrollment of about four hundred students. Twenty different congregations are represented in its student body. The influx to the Fraser valley is still in progress.



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- 1 J. N. Hoepfner, **Mennonite Life**, April, 1951.
- 2 C. H. Wedel, **Church History**, Volume IV p. 188.

## PART TWO

### A Profile of a Village, a Church, and a School

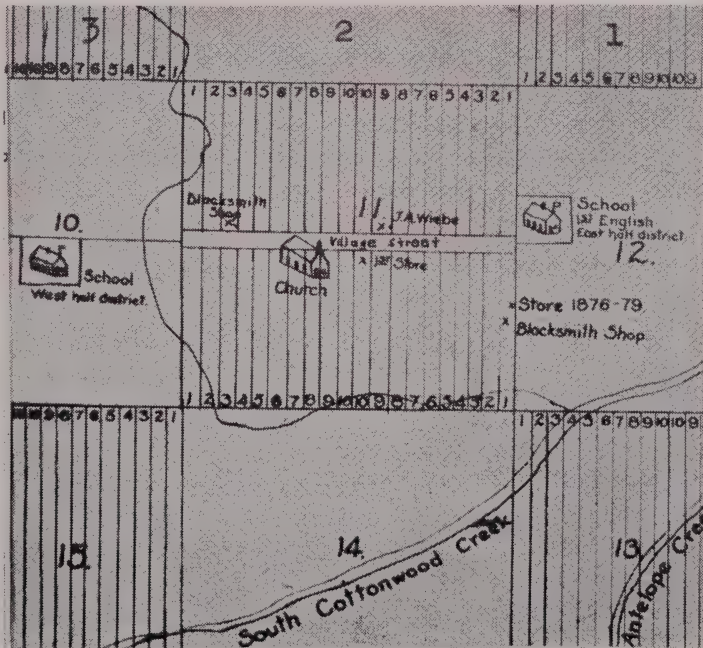
#### CHAPTER XV

#### A Profile of a Village

*To bring them out of that land unto a good land—Exodus.*

Gnadenau, literally translated means Grace Meadow. The group of immigrants that chose this name felt that it best expressed their spiritual and physical needs and aspirations. The name **Gnadenau** has had three connotations: It was used to denote a village, a church, and a school.

In August, 1874, Elder Wiebe, through C. B. Schmidt as agent, purchased twelve sections of Santa Fe land for three to seven dollars per acre. The settlers bought only railroad land because they feared the buying of homesteads might involve them in obligations not in harmony with their faith. The land was located in Risley township (now Liberty township) in Marion County, Kansas. The tract was traversed by the south branch of the Cottonwood river. While waiting for the arrival of the Crimean group, Elder Wiebe, with the advice of a few others, chose the spot



The Village Plan



## The Gnadenau Village At Different Stages of Development



Gnadenau in 1874



Gnadenau in 1875

where he himself wished to locate and what he felt would be a favorable location for a village. When the group arrived the site was unanimously approved. The village was to be laid out on section 11 but the land included eleven other sections. The Santa Fe owned and sold only alternate sections.

At the time of the arrival of the immigrants it was very hot and dry and only shortly before a devastating grasshopper plague had swept over Central Kansas. The few scattered settlers had either abandoned their shanties or were anxious to sell out to the newcomers or to rent them their land.

The Gnadenau village was laid out on a road running east and west in the middle of section 11. As well as can be determined there were originally twenty-four families that located in the village.

Another village, not as large as Gnadenau, was named **Hoffnungsthal** (Hope Valley) and was also laid out in the middle of a section with the village street running east and west. In Gnadenau, the huts; sod and adobe shanties, were spaced at regular intervals on the north side of the road and the sod church was also placed on the north side of the road in the middle of the village.

Conforming to the Mennonite village plan of South Russia, each half of the section was divided into twenty strips, each of equal width, and a half of a mile in length. Each farmer was to have a small acreage close in and more farther out. Wiebe says: "According to the Russian custom we settled in two villages, first Gnadenau and then Hoffnungsthal, three miles in the southwestern direction. Soon it became clear to us that it was not advisable to settle in closed villages, because each of us had to have his own deed. We later adjusted and exchanged our plots and some families moved out of the village to their own land."\* The settlers became scattered but the Gnadenau village road remains a legal public road up to the present time.

It is difficult to ascertain a list of the original Gnadenau settlers since shifts and adjustments were made almost from the beginning. The Kansas State Census of 1875 gives a list of family heads but it does not include all settlers.\*\* Church records are available but they include Hoffnungsthal as well as Gnadenau settlers. A few settlers in the village did not belong to the Crimean church group.

Immediately after arrival the newcomers staked out their individual plots and built some kind of hut for shelter against sun and rain. The settlers displayed much ingenuity. There was no "immigrant" house here, but some families stayed with neighbors, others put up tents, and some used their wagons and inverted wagon-boxes as part of their huts. Another pressing need was a well and this was quickly met by digging a joint well in the center of the village.

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\* J. A. Wiebe, **Wahrheitsfreund**, Volume I, No. 1. Other reasons for the disintegration of the village system: Distance from farm land. Influence of American neighbors. No need to band together in villages against thieves.

\*\* The list includes: Jacob Friesen, John Keck, Francis (Franz) Janzen, Jacob Cornelson, Abraham Cornelson, Andrew Pankratz, Peter Berg, Gerhard Wohlgenuth, Frank Groening, Aaron Schellenberg, Jacob Wiebe, David Block, Henry Block, Isaac Friesen, Peter Barkman, Abraham Goosen, John Harder, Cornelius Friesen, Francis (Franz) Hine, Anna F. Harms, Abraham Coop (Koop), Jacob Harms, Peter Janzen, Cornelius Enns, Abraham Becker.





Well of the Immigrants at Gnadenau

In the meantime they began to break up prairie for wheat and rye. Some land was available to rent since many of the native settlers had left and this proved an excellent opportunity for the newcomers to plant late crops. They worked in haste, realizing that winter would soon be upon them. By pooling their labor, oxen and horses, and implements, they succeeded in getting their temporary dwellings erected, some sheds built, and some land sown to wheat and rye. Some of the seed they had brought along from Crimea—carefully handpicked. Wiebe says: "The land was good and extremely fertile but the breaking of the sod was very hard."

Their dwellings at first were crude shanties of an extremely simple but useful type. They had no side walls but the roofs started from the ground and converged on top with only the ends of sod. The huts had an inverted "V" shape, the sides were held up by poles and were thatched with reed grass. An adobe chimney projected above the grass roof some twelve inches—a constant fire hazard. One end of the hut contained a brick stove and quartered the family—the other end sheltered a few head of livestock. The furniture consisted of chests and boxes, but each family had brought along warm bedding.

The next housing development was the adobe home. These structures were built out of cut and dried sod or out of adobe bricks. The adobe bricks were made by mixing earth, hay or straw, and water and were dried in the sun. Usually the bricks were of the Russian type; four inches thick, six inches wide, and twelve inches long. This type of home also had a grass thatched roof but it had adobe ends and walls. These dwelling places were built on a rectangular pattern with the family rooms at one end, the stables at the other, and storage space for grain in the garret. The grain





A Gnadenu Pioneer Adobe home no longer in existence.

was carried up in sacks by means of a ladder. Soon those that were able, built frame houses, but these too, were invariably on the Russian plan with living quarters, livestock, and granary under one roof. In the summer of 1875, Elder Wiebe already lived in a frame house.

A visitor reports: "In 1875 the Mennonites were still a strange people. They retained their little green flaring wagons they had brought from Russia, and were attempting to live here under the same rule they followed in Russia. Gnadenu was the most pretentious of their villages. It was a long row of houses, mostly built of sod and thatched with long prairie grass. A few of the wealthier citizens had built frame houses, furnished with the brick oven of Russian origin."<sup>1</sup> Many of the immigrants brought their Russian narrow gauge wagons, packed in large chests, believing that they were far superior to what they would be able to purchase in America.

Invariably each home had three pieces of household equipment. It had a Russian cedar chest, which had been brought well-filled with bedding and other articles. It also had a large clock hanging on the best wall, reaching from the ceiling almost to the floor. These clocks were operated by weights and had beautiful large numbered dials and long pendulums of brass. Some of these clocks had been brought from Prussia to Russia and then to America—many of them are still prized as immigration relics. Each home also had a Russian oven. This, to their American neighbors, was the greatest curiosity. This brick oven served a dual purpose; it was an efficient oven for baking huge trays of bread and *Zwieback* and once heated it kept the house warm for hours—all with a few armsful of straw or hay. Since fuel was scarce in America this type of oven was universally used by the settlers. Some were built very simply, some a little more elaborate, and many homes had two; one in the house for winter baking and heating and one outside for summer baking. All served their purpose well and were looked

upon with special favor. One writer says: "When I asked 'What will you use for fuel?' their answer was: 'Look around. We see it ready to our hands in every straw stack and on every prairie. Grass and straw are what our fathers before us have always used.' The grass furnace or stove is nothing costly, or complicated, or likely to get out of order. On the other hand it is a contrivance so simple that many will say of it as one man did when he first saw a railroad track: 'Nobody but a fool could have thought of so simple a thing.' In a word as the Irishman made a canon by taking a large hole and pouring iron around it, so the Mennonite mother of food and warmth is developed by building brick or stone around a hollow."<sup>2</sup>

The Mennonite villages in Russia had been practically self-sustaining—each having its own grocery, blacksmith, cobbler, miller, and the like, and its own church and school. Gnadenau, more than any other village in America, was laid out after that pattern.

A store was soon opened at Gnadenau, but it was not operated by one of the settlers but by a German-speaking Russian, Edward Dolgorouki. He was the only Russian in the village, a mysterious character, probably exiled from Russia, but not in any way connected with the immigrants. Gnadenau immediately ruled that no storekeeper would be permitted to sell intoxicating liquor or tobacco. This did not appeal to Dolgorouki and he soon left. A later business directory listed John Fast, one of the immigrants, as grocer.

There is also evidence that other trades were represented in the village. A Marion county census lists J. J. Friesen as machinist, John Keck as carpenter, Aaron Schellenberg as shoemaker, G. Bushman as tailor, C. Schenkofsky as blacksmith. Jacob Harms is lauded in the **Marion County Record** as being "a truly artistic painter. We have seen floral paintings by him, which looked so natural that we could scarcely refrain from attempting to pluck the flowery beauties." An 1878 business directory also lists the professional men of the village: A. Flaming, school teacher; John Harder, Baptist; C. Wedel, Mennonite; Jacob Wiebe, Baptist.\*

The settlers received their mail at the Risley post office. This station existed before the immigrants came and was operated by John Risley. Later John Fast was the postmaster. At first the Gnadenau settlement was known as **Risley** but the name of the post office soon changed to **Gnadenau**. The 1876 State Board of Agriculture report already has the mail station listed as "Gnadenau." When in 1878 Risley township was divided into Liberty and Risley townships the whole community became known as Gnadenau.

For their supplies the settlers had to go either to Marion Center or to Peabody. Most of their trading was done at Peabody because it had a railroad. Their lumber and freight was hauled from

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\* Probably the two ministers were listed as Baptists because they practiced the immersion form of baptism.



Szene vor der Postoffice in Gnadenau.

Frank Leslie Illustrated Newspaper

Scene at the Post Office at Gnadenau

Peabody and it was there that they took their grain and livestock. Merchants of Marion Center, however, also quickly saw trading opportunities as indicated by the following advertisement in the August 15, 1874 issue of the **Marion County Record**:

About thirty families have just arrived in Marion County and are settling six miles west of Marion Center. They want to buy thirty or forty span of work horses, milch cows, poultry, and everything necessary for the opening of their farms and to live on, for which they will pay cash.

Have your stock and other articles at Marion Center, Thursday morning, August 20th, and they will meet you with the money.

For further information call on J. C. Mehl, opposite of the post office.

The newspaper must have come out a few days late as the settlers did not arrive until the 16th, but Mr. Mehl lost no time in getting sellers and buyers together. Upon arrival the settlers found themselves in a whirl of excitement; besieged on the one hand by pressing needs and on the other by opportunities to buy land, livestock, and equipment. However, many of the Gnadenau settlers were poor and purchases had to be screened carefully. They paid cash but with loaned money. That Mehl's efforts were fruitful is indicated by a September 19th report in the same newspaper;

"One of the liveliest businessmen in town is our German friend, J. C. Mehl. He is doing a good work for Marion Center, as well as himself, by attracting and retaining, by fair and honorable dealing, the trade of our newly acquired citizens."

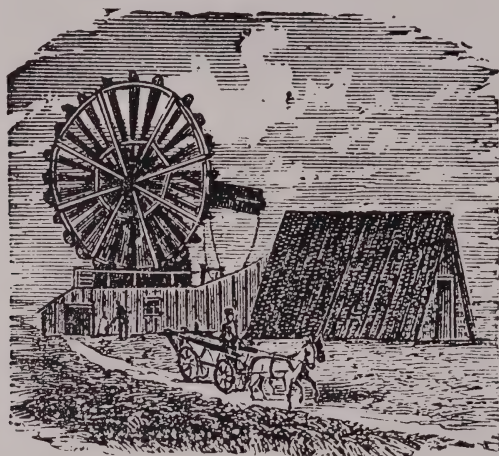
The chief food of the Mennonite settlers was bread, Zwieback, and a dark rye bread, and the need of a grist mill was immediately felt. In 1876, Jacob Friesen and his son Jacob J. Friesen erected a grist mill operated by a Dutch windmill. The mill was located west of the village on the Friesen land and was used to grind corn, rye, barley, and wheat. On March 16, 1877, the Peabody Gazette reported;

"The grist mill at Gnadenau is running day and night." It is not known how long the mill was in operation but the building was later used as a granary.

Another staple food of the newcomers was molasses. The fertile Kansas soil produced tall, juicy, cane stalks and each house-



wife knew how to boil the juice into tasty molasses to be used as a spread and for baking cookies. Soon several sugar cane mills, were busy from dawn until late at night. The power for operating the mill was furnished by a horse walking in a circle and pulling a beam which rotated the rollers. Large supplies of molasses were laid up by each family—some as much as one hundred gallons a year.



The 1876 Friesen Grist Mill

The Gnadenau village was laid out in conformity with modern planning commission ideas. The houses were far enough apart to permit various plantings, such as flower beds, orchards and gardens. The house was set back from the road to allow for flower beds in front of the house and shade and fruit trees along the street. That they succeeded quite well is indicated by the favorable reports by visitors. E. W. Hoch visited Gnadenau in 1876 and wrote: "Their yards are immense bouquets. Every other town in the country might well imitate Gnadenau in this matter".<sup>3</sup>

The immigrants were by nature "tree lovers" and they brought with them from southern Russia the mulberry, the apricot, and the olive tree. They planted trees for lanes and shade and each settler set out an orchard with fruit trees such as apricot, apple, pear, cherry and peach.\* For crops they planted wheat, rye, and corn and for the table, garden vegetables and watermelons. Nearly all the seed brought along from Russia responded well to the Kansas soil and climate.

Because of their novel village and unusual habits of living and dress, the Gnadenau settlers were a source of curiosity to the na-

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\* The Russian Dologorouki says in the 1875 **Kansas State Board of Agriculture Report**: "A row of trees, or hedge is ordered around each lot; a row of trees is ordered along the street; each individual is compelled to bear his share of the cost of this. The store-keeper is voted on."

tive Americans. Alberta Pantle, who herself lived in Marion county, reports:

"The men and boys dressed much alike and the little girls, in their full skirts and white aprons, looked like miniatures of their mothers. Clothing could be and usually was of the finest material, but no lace or other ornamentation was allowed. Blue was a favorite color. For many years the women did not wear hats to church but tied a kerchief or shawl over their heads. Musical instruments were not used in church and part singing was frowned upon."<sup>4</sup>



Gnadenu in 1878. Left, residence of Rev. Johann Harder. Right, on side of road, dwelling of Heinrich Bushman, herdsman of Gnadenu.

As a unique village Gnadenu was enough of a novelty on the Kansas prairies to attract many visitors. Someone remarked that residents of Marion county who had never visited the villages, Gnadenu and Hoffnungsthal, could be compared to people "who living in the vicinity of Niagara Falls or Kentucky's great cave, would not visit them."

In January, 1875 W. J. Groat visited Gnadenu and wrote:

"Approaching from the east you ascend a gentle raise of table land and at the summit of this gentle slope is where these peculiar people have built their strange village. At a distance it has the appearance of a group of hay-ricks, but on drawing nearer you will perceive human beings passing in and out. Driving past the schoolhouse, which is the first building in town, and is a snug frame house, neatly painted, and we understand both the English and the German dialects are taught within its walls—we pulled up at what we would call an adobe hut, or wigwam, being constructed of



prairie sod, cut in brick form and dried in the sun. The majority of these "fix-ups" have no side walls whatsoever, the roof starting from the ground and only the gables are laid up with these bricks. The roof is simply composed of poles, thatched, or shingled with prairie grass, with an adobe chimney projecting twelve or sixteen inches only above this dry hay. We were not in the fire insurance business or we would not have halted.

We were met at the door and invited in, and following, what was our astonishment to find ourselves plank upon the heels of a horse, but we were soon relieved by our hostess throwing open another door revealing a small passage, between a horse and a cow, leading into the presence of the family. Each one came forward and said "welcome," at the same time giving us a hearty shake of the hand. We were not a little surprised at the neat appearance of the interior. Instead of a stove, they have a large brick furnace, which will, they assured us, keep the room comfortable for a whole day with one heating. The furniture consists principally of bedding, of which they seem to have an abundant supply and of the warmest material.

Nearly every family had an old fashioned German timepiece, reaching from the ceiling to the floor, the weights and pendulum of polished brass, and apparently heavy enough to run a small engine; but we noticed that they all kept the same time. They have as yet but little use for the improved chair system, as they use their trunks and chests for that purpose. Still it will be remembered that these people have all moved in in the last six months, and a few have neat frame houses.\*

Another visitor to the villages was the Kansas historian, Noble L. Prentiss. He visited the villages in the fall of 1875 and reports:

Along the south branch of the Cottonwood is a row of grass thatched shanties called Hoffnungsthal. The settlers here are poor and the name of the town signifies "The Valley of Hope." The settlers live in hope. Next in order came the admirably-located town of Gnadenau. Mr. C. B. Schmidt seemed "mixed" as to the meaning of this word, and we are not positive whether it signifies "Valley of Grace" or "the place from which a fine prospect can be seen."

We drove along an immensity of broken prairie before we arrived at the acres of sod corn and watermelons which mark the corporation line of Gnadenau. The houses present every variety of architecture, but each house is determined on one thing, to keep on the north side of the one street of the town and face to the south. At the east end of the street in a red frame house with board window shutters painted green, lived Jacob Wiebe, the head man of Gnadenau. We found Mr. Wiebe a tall, powerfully-built man, with a more martial appearance than his brethren. This may arise from the circumstance that the Mennonite church is divided on the question of shaving, and Mr. Wiebe adheres to the bearded persuasion. Mr. Wiebe has built a house more nearly on the Russian model. He took us over the structure, a maze of small rooms and passages, the stable being under the same roof with the people, and the granaries over all, the great wheat stacks being located at the back door. An immense pile of straw was intended for fuel this winter.

Of course, we visited the watermelon fields, which in the aggregate seemed about a quarter section, and Mr. Wiebe insisted on donating a hundred pounds or so of the fruit—or is it vegetable—fearing we might go hungry on the road.



































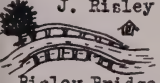









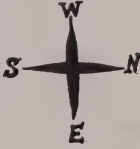
As we have mentioned these villages, we might say that the Mennonite system contemplates that the landholder shall live in the town and in the country at the same time. The villages of Gnadenau and Hoffnungsthal are fourteen sections of land, yet all the farmers live in towns, each of a single street. Near are gardens, and all around are the wide fields. Near each house were immense stacks of grain raised on the ground rented from men who were driven out last year by the grasshoppers.

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\* On April 1, 1878, Willie Groat commenced a term of school at Gnadenau. In August of that year he was employed to teach another term of six months.



# The Gnadenau Village at Its Peak

<p>West School </p> <p>Friesen Mill </p> <p>Jacob Friesen </p> <p>Rev. J. J. Friesen </p>	<p>Christ Hodel </p> <p>Henry Klassen</p> <p>Jac. J. Friesen </p> <p>G. F. Friesen</p> <p>J. E. Klassen</p>	<p>Johann Fast </p> <p>David Klassen</p> <p>Gerh. Schierling </p> <p>John Rose</p> <p>Gerh. Wall </p> <p>Henry Buller </p> <p>I. D. Klassen</p>
<p>Abr. Goossen </p> <p>Jac. Deutchman </p> <p>Abr. Friesen </p> <p>K.M.B. church </p> <p>Hein Bushman </p> <p>Jacob Eitel </p> <p>Martin Klassen </p> <p>Peter Flaming </p> <p>Cor. Toews </p> <p>Holcolm-</p>	<p>vil lage  S t r e e t</p> <p> school house</p> <p>Johann Fast</p> <p>Franz Janzen</p> <p>Franz Groening</p> <p>Gerh. Bushman</p> <p>Jacob Cornelson</p> <p>Andreas Pankratz</p> <p>Gerh. Wohlgenuth: Martin Friesen</p> <p>Cor. Franzen: Gerh. Cornelson</p> <p>Peter Wohlgenuth</p> <p>Peter Barkman</p> <p>Johann Harder</p> <p>Sod</p> <p>Franz Hein</p> <p>Aaron Schellenberg</p> <p>Jacob Wiebe: Geo. Thye</p> <p>David Block</p> <p>Jacob Harms</p> <p>Abraham Becker</p> <p>Isaac Friesen</p> <p>Johann Goossen</p> <p>Peter Janzen</p>	<p></p> <p>Franz Groening</p> <p>Abr. Groening</p> <p>John H. Unruh </p> <p>Jac Deutchman</p> <p>Jac. Duerksen</p> <p>Wm. Litke </p> <p>P. U. Schmidt</p> <p>Amanda Dohner</p> <p>C. Duerksen </p> <p> Orphans Home</p> <p>Founded in 1894</p> <p>Peter Flaming</p> <p>Gerh. Dalke </p> <p>Hein. Friesen </p> <p>Leon. Bartel</p> <p>Peter Berg </p>
<p>J. Risley </p> <p>Enns </p> <p>Jacob Prieb </p> <p>J. B. Loewen</p> <p>J. C. Friesen</p> <p>Store </p> <p>Blacksmith Shop</p> <p>Cor. Franzen</p> <p>J. Zachrias </p> <p>J. Risley </p> <p>Risley Bridge </p> <p>George Seibel </p>	<p> First School</p> <p>Org. 1871</p> <p>Andrew Flaming</p> <p>Hein. Block </p> <p>John D. Nickel </p> <p>Jacob Klassen</p> <p>Geo. Petker</p>	<p>Abr. Becker </p> <p>H. Flaming </p> <p>Frank. Hill</p> <p>J. T. Goossen</p> <p>John Fast </p> <p>Rein Feil</p> <p>Sam Feil</p> <p>Jacob Klassen</p> <p>Nicolai Jost </p> <p>David Dalke</p> <p>Cor. Toews</p> <p>G. B. Toews</p> <p>Peter Buhler </p> <p>Carl Scheikofsky</p> <div>  </div>

When we left the manly and hospitable Wiebes the evening was well advanced. At the top of the ridge we looked back into the wide, sunlit valley, and thought of the coming day when solid farm houses and great barns and waving orchards would line the long village street, even to Hoffnungstal; so we slashed open a watermelon, and drank to the health of Gnadenau.

The influx continued for a number of years. The **Marion County Record** reported: August 4, 1876. "About three hundred persons are expected in Gnadenau this week." November 3, 1876, "One hundred and fifty or two hundred more German-Russians are expected in Gnadenau soon." June 22, 1877. "Several families arrived in Gnadenau last week from Russia. More are expected every day." After 1879 the influx ended.



The former Jacob A. Wiebe home. The house was built by the Wiebes but has been remodeled several times. It is now the George Flaming farm.

As a village, Gnadenau today is extinct. Only reminders of the bustling pioneer village are the Gnadenau village road and a few crumbling tombstones in the abandoned cemetery that was located just south of the frame church. Instead of thirty settler homes along the village street there are today two modern farms. The Hoffnungstal village too has become extinct. Along its village road where a row of houses were located, not a single house is occupied. The Wiebe blacksmith shop on the west end has long ago disappeared. Only the Loewen mud house at the east end of the village still exists as a reminder of the past, although no longer inhabited.\*

Rapid and extensive changes have taken place. Modern farming methods have resulted in fewer and larger farms. The descendants of the pioneers have scattered to other farm regions or have been absorbed by other occupations and professions. Many

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\* In the summer of 1958 the Hillsboro Chamber of Commerce supervised the moving of the Loewen sod house to the Hillsboro Memorial Park. It is to be preserved as an immigration memorial.

live in nearby Hillsboro or in other cities. Some of the grandchildren of the founder of the villages reside in Canada and in Mexico.

In 1898 the Gnadenu church was relocated two miles south of Hillsboro and the cemetery also was relocated and placed north of the church. Here lie buried many of the founders of Gnadenu and Hoffnungsthal. An evergreen tree and a modest monument mark the graves of Jacob A. Wiebe and of his wife—no longer weeping. Nearby are the graves marked with tombstones bearing such pioneer names as: Jacob Friesen, 1893; Eduard Ebel, 1895; Heinrich Fast, 1895; Dietrich Wiebe, 1900; Franz Groening, 1901; Peter Barkman, 1904; Gerhard Peters, 1907; Abraham Harms, 1909; Heinrich Wiebe, 1910; John Baerg, 1919; Johann Regehr, 1919; John A. Flaming, 1921; Jacob A. Wiebe, 1921; Johann Har-der, 1930.



Gnadenu Church Cemetery

Such has been the inevitable price of change. Many visible things have disappeared. The mechanization of agriculture and the automation of industry have brought about revolutionary changes. Young men have been frozen out of agriculture and have gone to the cities. Here and there on Mennonite farms or in the museums of Bethel and Tabor College, spinning wheels, ox yokes, and Russian threshing stones speak of days gone by. The few remaining landmarks of pioneer days are fast fading away, but the eternal values will live on because they are indestructible.

### Chapter XV References

- 1 N. L. Prentis, *Kansas Miscellanies*.
- 2 J. D. Butler, *Mennonite Life*, October 1949.
- 3 *Marion County Record*, August 11, 1876.
- 4 Alberta Pantle, *Mennonite Life*, October 1947.



## CHAPTER XVI

### A Profile of a Church

*Where is the good way?—Jeremiah*

In order to understand the background of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church it is necessary to sketch briefly the beginning of several new Mennonite church bodies in Russia.

#### The Beginning of the Kleine Gemeinde Church

A group led by Klaas Reimer, in 1814 formed the **Kleine Gemeinde** church. Reimer and his adherents were sincere but extremely narrow in their views in regard to doctrine, education, and dress. In contrast to the large Mennonite body they were called the "**small church**." They were strict disciplinarians and strongly nonresistant but doubted that there could be salvation in any other group save their own. Literature, written by others, was condemned and they warned against "Millenium" beliefs—Reimer called these a "terrible mistake." Sermons were read—a free delivery was considered vain and boastful. Excommunication and the ban were promptly practiced, dress regulations strictly enforced, and musical instruments were not tolerated. In spite of their staid views a fanatical trend developed and Elder Reimer relates that some fell into grave excesses. In winter, almost naked, some had lain in ditches, praying long penitential prayers and one had died of exposure. Others had dreams and visions and a few fell into sexual sins, but Reimer opposed all this vehemently and for a while was pushed aside as leader.<sup>1</sup> Later the group became well organized and recognized, gained in numbers and was known for its extreme conservatism, stability, and good farming.

#### The Beginning of the Mennonite Brethren Church

January 6, 1860, marks the beginning of the **Mennonitische Brudergemeinde** in South Russia. On this day a group of lay brethren met and drew up a document in which they declared themselves a separate Mennonite body. The statement was composed by Abraham Cornelsen and signed by eighteen brethren soon to be joined by eight more. The document cannot be considered a statement of the faith and practice of the new church, but it sketched some fundamental beliefs. It stated: Baptism is to be administered upon the evidence of a living faith; the Lord's Supper is for believers only; ministers should be called by God or through the church; discipline should be practiced. In other points they stated they agreed with Menno Simons.\*

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\* For a complete text of the document see P. M. Friesen, pages 189 to 192, or A. H. Unruh, pages 51 to 54.

When the Kleine Gemeinde withdrew the baptismal form was not an issue. They baptized as practiced by the older church. With the Mennonite Brethren also, the baptismal form was not an issue. J. F. Harms states: "The widely accepted opinion is that the members of the Mennonite Brethren church left their former church in order to practice the immersion form of baptism. This, however, is not so. The baptismal question and baptismal form played no role when the church began, only conversion and spiritual life were the motives." The first baptismal service was not held until September 23, 1860, and some waited two years before being immersed. When baptism became an issue, the form was "during the first year three times backward, later as practiced by the Mennonite Brethren today."<sup>2</sup> According to another, "the group wavered between baptizing the kneeling candidate forward or standing and baptizing backward and practiced both forms but later decided on the latter."<sup>3</sup>

The move met with opposition by church and village officials. Five elders declared that under no circumstances could the organization of a new church be permitted. Some were imprisoned. Abraham Cornelsen, a school teacher, was compelled to move to a non-Mennonite village. William Janzen was partly disrobed and flogged. One says: "We were driven with sticks from the baptismal water but we chose a different place and the holy act was carried out. April 22, 1862." Another tells of leaders thrown in prison where "the windows were covered day and night so they could not read." Peter Berg was searched before imprisonment and when a New Testament was found the captors said: "Aha! Here he has a Testament. Take it away. He has read long enough in it."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, small groups felt the need of fervent religious expression and banded themselves together for new brotherhoods.

The group was not only called on to go through outer opposition but also through severe inner conflicts. Unhappily a faction of an extreme "joyous" persuasion gained entrance and threatened to undermine the movement. This radical section appropriated literally passages like, "**Once more you shall take the tambourine and dance merrily.**" (Jeremiah 31:4). They carried on their meetings with shoutings, dancing, and tambourine music.<sup>5</sup> However by June 27, 1865, the group had succeeded in eradicating this element. A protocol stated: "The wild joyous demonstrations like dancing we unanimously declare as 'not pleasing to the Saviour' and the tambourine, as creating much stumbling, should not be used, nor should unseemly exciting music be used, except music in a lovely and pleasing way. Joy in the Lord is not forbidden but only as is seemly."<sup>6</sup> The Mennonite Brethren group had now become stable, was recognized as a separate church body, and spread to different regions in South Russia.\*

\* Mrs. H. T. Esau in *The Story of Our Church* says: "The brethren, elected preachers and Heinrich Huebert became the first Elder. They bought the saloon in the village Rueckenau, and that became the first church. In it also was started the first Sunday School and church choir among the Mennonites in Russia."

### The Beginning of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church

After the Crimean War, twenty-five-year-old Jacob A. Wiebe with others, bought a Mohammedan village on the Crimean Peninsula. Wiebe also built a flouring treadmill. The group expected to prosper but instead encountered severe setbacks. Scorching droughts, spider plagues, and livestock epidemics produced great losses. Wiebe, although a trained coachman, lost eighteen horses during the first year. The settlers were unaccustomed to farming in Crimea and many became very poor and one Mennonite despaired and committed suicide. All of this led to sober thinking and soul searching and Wiebe was the first convert. Immediately he went about soliciting others. He says: "I told my experience to my dear Jonathan, Aaron Schellenberg, and he was happy with me and also had the same experience. Soon others joined us, but we felt as sheep without a shepherd."<sup>7</sup>

In 1864, Elder Friesen of the Kleine Gemeinde came to organize the group and Wiebe told Friesen that they first wanted to be baptized on their faith. This, Friesen said, he could not do. It was against the rules of the Kleine Gemeinde to rebaptize. Friesen said he too, had at first felt the need of baptism on faith, when he joined the Kleine Gemeinde but the important thing was to lead a quiet, godly, faith life. A local Kleine Gemeinde group was then organized and in 1867, Jacob A. Wiebe and Peter Berg were elected ministers and in early 1869, Wiebe was elected and ordained as Elder.

All the time Wiebe and his group had conscience scruples about their commitment. They felt they should have been baptized on faith by immersion. They found that they differed widely with the Kleine Gemeinde on "faith assurance." They quoted freely: **"The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."** This emphasis the Kleine Gemeinde considered boastful. Finally, after Wiebe had preached sixty sermons, he and his group felt that they must organize a church more in accord with their convictions.

They took this step as a church and they did not have to struggle for existence like the Kleine Gemeinde and Mennonite Brethren had to. However, they found it difficult to decide on the form of baptism and on other church practices. Undoubtedly they were influenced in their course by contacts with the Mennonite Brethren and by their Kleine Gemeinde experience.

The Krimmer group had its beginning in Crimea, September 21, 1869. Elder Wiebe writes that the organization was undertaken "after much prayer and searching in God's Word as well as in Menno Simon's writings." They believed that "baptism on faith" is essential and they decided on forward immersion in a kneeling position as most closely typifying baptism in the death of Christ.\*

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\* It has been erroneously reported that the Krimmer group practiced "Trine" immersion. They baptized kneeling and once forward. The charge that they chose the forward form to block a merger with the Mennonite Brethren group has consistently been denied by the founders of the Krimmer group.



The group selected Kornelius Enns, a layman, to baptize Elder Wiebe, who then in turn baptized the eighteen candidates, Enns included.

These nineteen left their former church for three reasons: They felt the need of a more fervent religious life. They believed the Scriptures teach baptism on faith by immersion and they believed one can and must have salvation assurance. Elder Wiebe's baptismal text was: **"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your soul."** Wiebe says: "This was a day of blessings. We felt the Lord's presence."

The new church emphasized conversion, immersion, strict observance of nonconformity, church discipline, nonresistance, feet washing, and abstention from the oath. They chose as their motto: **"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."** A novel practice with them was the New Testament injunction: **"Salute one another with an holy kiss"**—but only men with men and women with women.

The group displayed a mixture of conservative and liberal tendencies. They adopted the 1632 Dortrecht Confession of Faith and the Kleine Gemeinde influence is apparent in their emphasis of simplicity in dress, their frowning on musical instruments, and their strict discipline. On the other hand they ardently advocated such new innovations as Sunday Schools, Missions, free delivery of sermons, and audible prayers by men and women. Elder Wiebe described their five Basic Faith Foundations as follows:

1. We accept the Bible as God's Word, written by men of God, moved by the Holy Spirit.

2. To live according to the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5. To practice peacefulness, forgiveness, sacredness of marriage, to take no oath or revenge, to follow Christ as nonresistants, and to love our enemies. Such Christ promises that they shall be the children of God.

3. To follow baptism according to Matthew 3:3-17, the Lord's Supper according to Luke 22 and I Corinthians 11, and the washing of feet according to the Gospel.

4. To participate in home and foreign Missions work according to ability.

5. To practice church discipline according to Matthew 18.

Our confession of faith is based on the eighteen articles compiled and lived by the early Mennonites. At the time of our organization we introduced the Sunday School, unknown in our churches at that time. We commemorated the day of our organization with a baptismal service and a love feast.<sup>8</sup>

### The Gnadenau Church

The Krimmer group came to America to maintain their faith principles and to seek freedom from military service. Among the immigrants may have been those who came for adventure and some for economic reasons but with this group it was clearly for "conscience sake." They left Europe with a heavy heart, holding a farewell service in the bow of the ship. Three months later they celebrated their arrival with a meal and a praise service. After

having staked out their homes they provided a simple place of worship. It was a crude structure, similar to their other huts and shanties, made of slabs of sod, dried in the sun and laid, like bricks, one on top of another. It had no foundation and the roof was made of reed grass. The structure was built in the center of the village and served as a worship house and as a school. After a few years the walls crumbled and a frame church was erected in 1877.

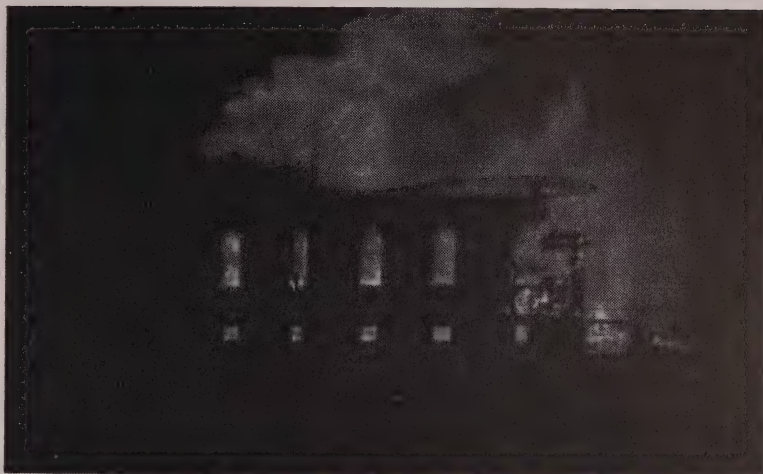
More immigrants came and joined the Gnadenau congregation and soon it was necessary to add a wing to the rectangular church building. Just south of the church a cemetery was placed and here a few tombstones still mark the early graves. The first one of the Krimmer group to die in Kansas was Mrs. Abraham Cornelsen, who passed away soon after arrival. The first child born in the Gnadenau group and believed to have been the first immigrant child born in America was Katharina Flaming, the late Mrs. Gerhard Friesen of Buhler, Kansas. The Gnadenau congregation worshipped in the sod church from 1874 to 1877; in the frame church from 1877 to about 1885, and in the wing church from 1885 to 1897.



Gnadenau Church 1898 to 1956

As a result of the breakdown of the village system the church members had become scattered and the center of the church membership had shifted west. Many had settled in the Hoffnungsthal and Alexanderfeld villages and in the surrounding regions. In 1897 the group decided to erect a new church and to relocate it two miles south of Hillsboro, in between the villages of Gnadenau, Hoffnungsthal, and Alexanderfeld. Most of those buried in the cemetery were moved to the new church cemetery just north of the new church. The edifice was dedicated June 19, 1898.

During 1956 the Gnadenau congregation considered plans for remodeling the church or building a new sanctuary as the almost sixty-year-old building had become inadequate. Then early on Christmas morning the building was completely destroyed by fire.



The Gadenau Church in Flames

Nothing could be saved except the lumber from the dismantled Lehigh Mennonite Brethren church which was stored on the Gadenau church grounds.

Immediately plans were made to erect a new building. The center of the church membership had shifted to the north since a good number of the members lived in Hillsboro. Consequently it was decided to relocate the church to Hillsboro where a favorable site was available. In April, 1957, groundbreaking services were held for a structure forty feet wide and ninety-five feet long with a Sunday School wing, thirty-eight feet wide and forty-three feet long. The sanctuary was dedicated May 4, 1958. The brick building has a seating capacity of three hundred with an overflow room and fifteen Sunday school rooms. The cemetery was to remain as before, two miles south of Hillsboro.



Gadenau Mennonite Brethren Church, Hillsboro, Kansas



There are two certificates of incorporation on record. The first one was filed February 5, 1877, as **Gnadenau Mennonite Church of Gnadenau, Marion County**. The trustees were: Jacob Wiebe, Johann Harder, John Goosen, Peter Barkman, Aron Schellenberg, Franz Groening, and Gerhard Buschman. On March 30, 1899, the name was changed to **Gnadenau Crimean Mennonite Brethren Church**. All trustees are different: Heinrich Wiebe, John Berg, John Flaming, Peter M. Barkman, Dietrich Wiebe, Abraham Groening, John Peters, and John J. Friesen. There is no record that the name was changed but in 1917 the conference was incorporated as **Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church of North America**.

Elder Wiebe continued as leader until 1900. Johann Harder was his able assistant. Wiebe says: "Harder, who shared with me the same belief, was very helpful in the work. He was, as we sometimes say, my right hand."<sup>9</sup> It is not known that there ever was friction between the two. One report says: "Harder had a good education, strong convictions, and a firm character and he was a great help in the building of the church."<sup>10</sup>

For many years Elder Wiebe served as minister. He was also a meticulous farmer. Since his early training had been that of a coachman, his horses were always well fed, well groomed, and well trained. His farm was well taken care of and his plows never rusty. He also was a "bone setter" of no mean reputation—patients coming from near and far. For his expert services he charged nothing and accepted, when pressed, only the cost of liniment and splints. He based his refusal to accept pay on; "**Go preach, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: Freely ye have received, freely give.**"

To Elder Wiebe's door there was a well worn path of people who sought spiritual counsel, bodily help, and financial aid, and few went away uncomfortable. He and his co-workers believed in Divine healing and there were examples of faith restorations but this was never carried to extremes. They did not hesitate to apply home remedies and to call a physician.\* They believed man must do his part. Constantly the group admonished each other to be good examples. Besides their own children the Wiebes raised four foster children.\*\*

Other ministers of the congregation were: Johann Harder, Heinrich Wiebe, Abraham Klassen, Abraham Harms, David Schroeder, Peter A. Wiebe, and Johann Flaming. These were not volunteers but had been elected by the group and each served a probationary period before ordination. All served without pay. At least two preached at each service and each was expected to be ready to preach at any time. They worked out good sermons behind the plow or late at night. What was lacking in training and eloquence was compensated by sincerity and Bible knowledge.

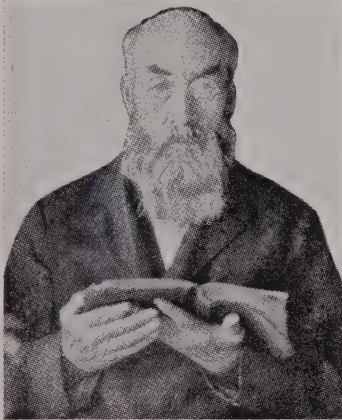
In 1900, Heinrich Wiebe succeeded Jacob A. Wiebe until he suddenly passed away in 1910. From then on John J. Friesen,

\* Dr. Fillipin, a negro medical physician, had located in Gnadenau.

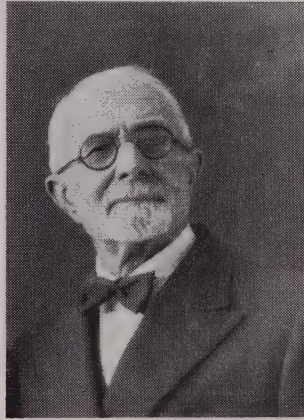
\*\* One foster daughter became the wife of Rev. Jacob G. Barkman. Another the wife of Rev. Jacob Z. Wiebe.

a son of the village miller Jacob Friesen, served as leader. In 1937 the congregation called Frank V. Wiebe, a returned missionary, and he continued until 1947. Meanwhile the church found itself in a transition period concerning the use of the English language and pastor's remuneration. At about 1948 to 1950 the congregation changed to English in church services and since then the pastors have received financial support. Since 1947, Esra Barkman, George L. Classen, and Edward Epp have served as leaders. From 1952 to 1955, David V. Wiebe served as pastor and in 1955, Dr. P. R. Lange. In 1956 the Gnadenau congregation extended a call to Franklyn L. Jost as pastor.

### Early Gnadenau Church Leaders



Elder Jacob A. Wiebe  
1836-1921



Rev. John J. Friesen  
1861-1939

The Krimmer group was intent to do God's will and to base their decisions on the Bible. Practices which they felt must be shunned were: pride, dancing, cards, gambling, drinking, smoking, profanity, Sunday labor, lusts, and an unforgiving spirit.

In spite of the strict church rules a sensitive conscience is readily discernable. They had scruples about photographs because in the Ten Commandments the making of **"any likeness of any thing"** is forbidden. They frowned upon musical instruments holding that a Christian is to **"Make melody in the heart."** Dresses were to be plain and jewelry was forbidden based on: **"Let it not be that outward adorning or plaiting of hair, and wearing of gold, or of putting on apparel."** Friendliness and hospitality were cultivated but jokes were considered evil and in sermons unthinkable. Members seen joking at public auctions were reprimanded.

At one time horses were stolen from the settlers but the brethren refused to prosecute or to take part in court proceedings. At another time a professional robber from Newton came to the abode of a Gnadenau minister at night and with pointed revolver

demanded money. The minister, unruffled, commanded the Negro to put away his gun and began to preach to him.

The settlers abstained from homesteading for fear of becoming politically involved. Wiebe wrote: "We believed that privileges from the state involved also duties to the state. We did not want to become citizens as yet." They warned against intemperance in conduct, debts, and buying much land.

Once a brother had secretly put his children in a freight car to save on tickets and the church promptly passed this resolution: "The brotherhood is deeply grieved by this affair of unfaithfulness and voted that Jacob A. Wiebe shall make the brother concerned guilty to confess this wrong to the railroad company. All brethren should take heed not to yield to such pollutions" (Befleckung).

The group had those who found it difficult to walk the narrow path and occasionally lapses had to be dealt with. A member who from time to time fell into intemperate drinking was repeatedly forgiven upon confession and repentance. Another had the weakness to stretch things, engulfing himself in claims utterly unfounded. Here too, the brotherhood recognized the difficult problem and with much forbearance endeavored to help the brother walk circumspectly. However, when serious trespasses occurred, not followed by repentance, the church resorted to the ban. In their brotherhood meetings they worked for unanimity. If this could not be achieved, action was delayed and the matter further discussed. They were concerned to work "in love." When feelings threatened to endanger their judgment, any brother had the privilege to suggest a song. By the time it was ended feelings usually were well under control and deliberations could proceed calmly.

### Gnadenau Brotherhood Song\*

Do not judge with stern rebuking, When you see a brother fail:  
Lest your own faults overlooking, You forget, you too, are frail.  
Christ looks for a tender heart; Not to judge, the Christian's part.

Ev'n by obvious transgressions, Watch your thinking, words and deeds.  
Is your heart controlled by passions? Search your soul, take careful heed.  
Judging others Christ forbade; "Judge not," is what Jesus said.

The Mennonite historian, C. Henry Smith, says of the Gnadenau church:

"They were strict disciplinarians of both the conduct and appearance of their members. The sale of tobacco and liquor was prohibited in their village at the time when the free use of both was not regarded as a major sin by most of the other Russian Mennonite groups. Young people were carefully chaperoned by their elders in all the gatherings, both social and religious. Sunday schools were held in the afternoons so as to minimize the possibility of desecrating the Sabbath by any less worthy activities. Dress regulations likewise were strict. Like other groups they discouraged worldliness in superfluous dress, carrying guns, hail insurance and voting."

The early church members were reluctant to accept anything "new." Shiny buggies were looked upon as vain and in some in-

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\* The song was, "Richte Nicht," in *Heimatklaenge* No. 108.  
Translated by the writer of this report.

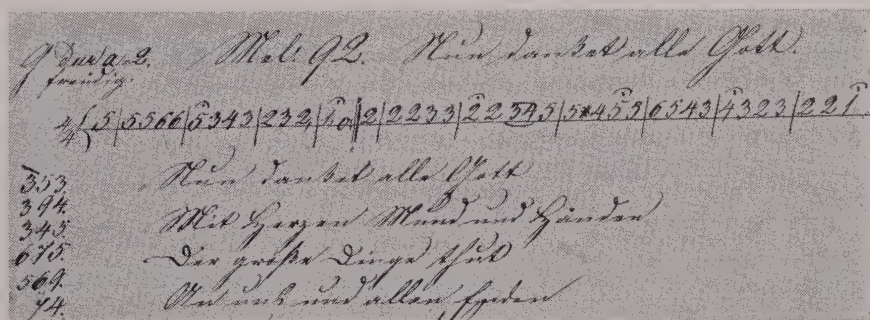


stances repainted a dull gray. Harnesses that came out with sparkling red hames were painted black. Gaudiness, boasting and extravagance were carefully avoided and austerity in conduct and appearance was generally practiced. Bicycles, ties and photographs were permitted only after lengthy deliberations. A novel arrangement in the Gnadenau frame church was a four foot high partition separating the men and women of the congregation. Some children sat with their mother—some with the father—but families did not sit together in services.

Only the most necessary work was done on Sunday. Church services began at ten o'clock and often the noon meal was shared. Sunday school was held in the afternoon and in the evening preaching services followed. Church services consisted of sermons, prayers, testimonies, and the singing of hymns. The song books were without notes—the congregation usually knowing both words and melody by memory and all joining in. A unique feature was the "testimonial giving" at the close of their services. They also encouraged to make confessions and restitutions. Although stressing deep religious experiences the Gnadenau group never advocated or practiced excesses. After an "examination" the convert was baptized and was expected to live a "newness" of life and to be active in Christian service. No one dared to participate in the communion service with a quarrel against his neighbor. If stumblings had occurred they were dealt with until repentance and forgiveness had been reached.

Although at first the group objected to musical instruments and singing in parts, yet they had carried with them from Germany and Russia, songs suitable for every occasion. The melody was acquired by singing from numbers instead of notes. These "melody books" had been painstakingly written with pen and ink.

### Now Thank We All Our God



This Melody Book was written by Cornelius P. Wedel in 1855. It was used in the Mergenau school in Russia and in the Gnadenau village. It contains 163 melodies.

In 1883 the Gnadenau brotherhood passed the following resolution: "The printing of a song book has today been voted—one thousand copies. Some brethren will advance the money: Heinrich Fast, \$50; John Regier, \$25; Jacob Wiebe, \$25; Gerhard Peters,

\$25; Dietrich Wiebe, \$5; Abraham Harms, \$20." The book was called *Lieder-Auswahl* (Song Selections) and contained 754 songs but all without notes. As many as thirty songs have the same melody. Besides songs usually found in church hymnals this collection had baptismal, feet washing, elections of ministers and deacons, engagement, wedding, excommunication, reinstatement, morning, evening, and table songs. It contained no national songs but several for prayerful intercession for rulers and governments. It was printed at Elkhart, Indiana in 1884. Soon, however, there was a noticeable departure from the heavy slow singing to lighter melodies such as were found in "Gospel Hymns," probably the result of the widespread introduction of John Wesley's more popular lighter gospel songs and melodies.\*

The group believed in the sharing of misfortune. For many years they had their own fire insurance. The financial status of each brother was no secret. Each was admonished not to contract debts beyond ability to pay. An 1885 resolution indicates their concern for each other: "The brotherhood has agreed to help J. F. in the North (Tampa) in his difficulties and to stand back of the brethren who signed the note for him." Another decision states: "The brotherhood feels it our duty to pay for the horse (Gaul) Brother G. B. bought from G. W." The latter person was not a member.

The Gnadenau group was saturated with a desire to propagate the Gospel. Transportation means were limited and traveling difficult, yet they went to neighboring hamlets, counties, and states to preach, baptize and organize churches. Their missionary zeal was not in vain and during the first decades the church achieved rapid growth, spreading to Oklahoma, Nebraska, Dakota, and even to Canada. In spite of shortcomings it is evident that this group did much pioneering in evangelism and welfare work. An 1893 resolution indicates how intent they were to spread the Gospel. "How shall we carry out our mission responsibilities?" Answer: "We agreed that:

- a. Brother Jacob A. Wiebe is to work in Dakota one month.
- b. Brother Heinrich Wiebe is to work in Nebraska and Colorado.
- c. The journey to Texas is to take place in February, 1894.
- d. Brother Harms and Brother Schroeder are to work one month in Reno and McPherson county.
- e. Brother Harder and the deacons are to work one month in Marion county.
- f. Brother Thiessen (Nebraska) and Brother Peter Wiebe (Kansas) are to do mission work in Butler county.

Besides the evangelistic work, which was all done without pay, as early as 1890, the Gnadenau group spearheaded a welfare project for homeless children. At first a frame building was built one half mile north of the village church. In 1893 this was replaced by a four-story stone structure for which many loads of stone

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\* Wesley introduced the lighter type songs saying, "One should not let the devil have what is good."



had to be hauled with horses and wagons from Marion. An 1893 resolution states: "It was voted to begin with the building of the orphan home. Brother Tobias Martin volunteered to pay for the breaking of the stones and to provide the roof for the building." The institution was called **Industrial School and Hygiene Home for Friendless**. Orphan children were brought from Chicago and elsewhere and at times more than fifty have been housed in the building. The institution had a farm, a purebred Jersey dairy herd, and a print shop where for several years the "**Industrial Home Journal**" was printed. Later the need for an orphanage seemed to disappear and the orphan home was converted into the **Salem Home** for the ill and aged. In 1944 this historic institution was destroyed by fire caused by lightning. The patients and the work was transferred to the Salem Hospital Annex in Hillsboro.

The church also took an active part in home and foreign mission work. In 1900 the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren conference opened a mission station among the colored people at Elk Park, North Carolina. In 1917 the Gnadenau group together with the conference sponsored the erection of the Salem Hospital at Hillsboro.



First Salem Hospital Building\*

At about 1900 the Gnadenau congregation had reached a membership of two hundred and fifty. The official **Gnadenau**

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\* In 1956 a new modern Salem Hospital was constructed in Hillsboro and the former building after remodeling is used as a home for aged.





study God's Word. If not all look equally far into our future happiness we want to respect each other's views.

1896.—The conference voted:

a. No tobacco is to be used.

b. No strong drinks except medicine are permissible.

1898.—What shall we do with the *Gemeindeblatt*? Voted that Brother J. J. Wiebe prints it twice monthly. J. Z. Wiebe and J. G. Barkman are to help gather material. The conference guarantees 500 subscriptions.

1899.—The conference agreed to have no part in life insurance, theater attendance, ball games, circus, and saloons.

1900.—Voted to begin a mission work in India. Voted that Brother Heinrich Wiebe and Brother John Esau assume the supervision of the churches. Brother Jacob A. Wiebe and Brother Jacob Klassen wish to be relieved.

### Adjustment Difficulties

The Crimean group stands high in evangelistic zeal, in welfare work and in its mission endeavors. Yet this group thrust into a new world, new surroundings, new influences, and new generations coming on, had difficult problems to meet and possibly, in some areas failed to make the needed adjustments. Numbers are not the only criterion but the following factors may have had an influence in retarding their expansion.

With this group higher education was a **Dilemma**. They believed strongly in elementary and in Bible schools but they feared greatly the influence of high schools, colleges, and universities. During the first decades there prevailed a feeling against higher education. Sometimes the aversion went so far as to stamp all advanced education as evil. Subsequently, some of the young people who longed for knowledge, felt frustrated and others joined churches that were more tolerant to higher education. The church retained some excellent leaders but a paucity of well trained leaders was inevitable.

With the strongly conservative background it is understandable that much emphasis was placed on dress and minor details. This was done with much sincerity but, nevertheless, perhaps too much emphasis was given to nonessentials that change with the times.

It appears that the group may have suffered losses on account of their attitude towards musical instruments. Singing was encouraged and there was good singing in their school and church,\* but singing in parts was frowned upon and musical instruments were not tolerated. Those with musical inclinations did not find the atmosphere congenial and joined circles where musical abilities were recognized. Later the group practiced singing in parts and accepted musical instruments in the home as well as in church.\*\*

\* Elder Wiebe was an excellent singer and Harder's German school was highly commended by the county superintendent for their fine singing.

\*\* The Mennonite Encyclopedia states: "In worship the simpler older practices were long observed. Musical instruments and choirs were introduced only about 1940. Part singing was long forbidden." This seems to be an overstatement. Actually part singing was introduced in Gnadenau in the first decade by Andreas Flaming and the conference officially sanctioned cultivating part singing in 1890. In the writer's home there was an organ and other musical instruments as early as about 1905 and the church had a choir. Musical instruments were introduced into some Krimmer churches in about 1920.

During the first decade the group was confined in narrow limits in accepting members from other churches. Only persons who had been baptized by immersion could be received—sometimes only after much delay. The group had been frightened by appearances in other groups of shallowness and excesses and they were exceedingly cautious in receiving members from other churches. In 1875 two Mennonite Brethren families settled in Gnadenau and it “was believed that they would join, but it did not come to pass because of the extreme conservativeness of the Krimmer group.”<sup>11</sup> An 1885 resolution stated that if members from the Brethren church wished to join they must first be thoroughly examined in regard to their faith and then can be received without baptism or with baptism.<sup>12</sup> An individual, baptized by Elder Buhler, waited more than a year before he was received. A missionary wished to join and the conference voted to support him and to cherish him as a brother but not to receive him as a member. Persons, baptized on faith but not by immersion, could not join except by rebaptism. Strict baptismal regulations have hindered the acceptance of individuals and conference mergers.

Their expansion was also retarded for occupational reasons. The Gnadenau pioneers were farmers and believed in farming. They farmed, preached, and taught school. The mainstay of the Mennonite church has been the rural community and this idea prevailed strongly in the Krimmer circles. Business ventures and living in cities were emphatically discouraged. An 1882 resolution stated: “The brotherhood believes it is not yet necessary for our brethren to go into business. Other ways to make a living are still open, which we believe are less dangerous for our own good and that of the church. The brotherhood is united in their conviction not to permit a brother to enter such an occupation.”<sup>13</sup> The churches were almost exclusively rural churches and when later more towns developed and land became scarcer many of their young people moved to town for economic advantages.

It has been said that when the Santa Fe branch was built from Marion to McPherson, if the Gnadenau settlers had so wished, the railroad would have been routed near the settlement and the village could have developed into a small city. This, however, was contrary to the convictions of the settlers. Alberta Pantle reports: “The coming of the railroad was conceived with no little opposition in Gnadenau. The chief factor in this opposition was the anticipated rise in taxes but there was also a strong feeling that the new railroad would bring new non-German settlers whose presence would endanger the entity of the Mennonite community. At an election in Risley township on December 16, 1878, the railroad bonds carried by a vote of 77 to 43. Just how large a part the Mennonites at Gnadenau took in the election is not known, probably little, since it was still very much against their belief to take part in elections although they must have been vitally interested in the outcome.”<sup>14</sup> Soon after the coming of the railroad, Hillsboro became the trading center of the community, and several churches of other denominations were established here.



### Merger Considerations

From their beginning the Cremean Brethren have not been adverse to exploring merger possibilities with likeminded groups. When the church organized it felt itself very much united with the Mennonite Brethren. Elder Wiebe says: "We wanted to be called simply **Bruedergemeinde** but since at various places in Russia brethren churches existed they called us **Krimmer Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde**."<sup>15</sup>

Yet there were some differences. With the Crimean group baptism was important. Also they had inherited a staid conservative attitude from their former church and had misgivings about stressing **Millenium** teachings. They feared "joyous" demonstrations and practiced austerity in conduct and dress. They frowned upon the use of musical instruments—especially did they object to the tambourine (Pauke or Trommel). Nevertheless, they contacted a Mennonite Brethren group in Crimea, led by Herman Peters. This was unfortunate. Peters himself, was out of harmony with the Mennonite Brethren and had separated from them and had moved to Crimea. He and his group of twenty members still defended the "joyous" conduct and the use of the tambourine. This did not appeal to the Wiebe group. Another difference was that the Wiebe group believed strongly in nonresistance—rejecting all military and alternate service. Many Mennonite Brethren were inclined to be more lenient and considered accepting some alternative government service.

The Crimean group left Russia as a church body and at Gnadenu the congregation carried on their church functions uninterruptedly. In 1876 a large group of Mennonite Brethren from the Volga arrived, led by Elder Peter Eckert. The Gnadenau group worshipped in the village sod church; the Eckert group in the East English schoolhouse.

Both Eckert and Wiebe felt that it would be well if the two brethren groups could unite. A merger was also strongly recommended by two ministers, Wienert and Braun, from Illinois, who came to Gnadenau to help effect a union. Unfortunately these mediators appeared to the groups as vain and dictatorial. Nevertheless, a strong attempt was made to unite.

The first difficulty was baptism. Each group wished to retain its form but finally the Gnadenau group was willing to surrender theirs.\* The second matter was even more difficult. "The Volga brethren justified the sister kiss (that brethren and sisters greeted each other with a kiss)."<sup>16</sup> This the Gnadenau group could not accept and the Volga people agreed to abstain from it. The Eckert group also made much of millenium doctrines while the Gnadenau brethren felt that a newness of life was more important. Finally both groups agreed that each should be free to hold its views but that the teaching should not be stressed. Also the Gnadenau

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\* This indicates that although the Krimmer group had firm convictions in regard to the Scriptural basis for a forward form of immersion, the baptismal form was not the most important issue with them nor need it have prevented a merger.

group objected to the use of musical instruments and the Eckert brethren, rather reluctantly, agreed to refrain from this.

Finally the last hurdle was that of leadership. The Krimmer group felt happy with Wiebe as Elder and suggested that both, Wiebe and Eckert continue as co-elders. It now appeared that Wiebe's elder status was questioned since he had been ordained while still in the Kleine Gemeinde. (The Kleine Gemeinde ordained but did not lay on hands.) The Wiebe group felt hurt and not ready to give all the leadership over to Eckert. This difficulty was insurmountable. A few years later several issues would have been much easier to adjust. The Krimmer group had become more tolerant to musical instruments and accepted millenium ideas and the Volga group had eradicated the sister kiss. No one questioned Wiebe's elder status later, but both groups had become self-functioning and well-established. One merger advocate believed that at that time a merger would not have been profitable because, "Later it appeared that the Illinois brethren and Kansas brethren could not agree."<sup>17</sup>

In 1880 John Holdeman visited the Krimmer group and was permitted to preach. Upon request an interview was arranged between Holdeman, Wiebe, and Abraham Klassen, a Kleine Gemeinde minister. Klassen had moved from Nebraska to Kansas—later joining the Krimmer congregation. When Holdeman refrained from greeting Wiebe and Klassen with a kiss, they felt that there was not enough brotherly love. The three agreed on conversion, justification, and nonresistance but differed in other respects. Wiebe felt not all other groups should be looked upon as "Babel" but Holdeman believed there must be no fellowship with others. The Krimmer group also objected to the Holdeman pouring form of baptism and to dream revelations, such as Holdeman said he had.<sup>18</sup>

In 1884 another attempt was made to merge the Krimmer and Mennonite Brethren groups. This time two individuals, Hahnhart and Heinrich Peter Lohrenz, promoted a merger. A joint meeting was arranged of which one reports: "Our Mennonite Brethren groups showed little willingness but Wiebe's group wished that a merger might take place. A conference was held February 1, 1884. Out of all our churches in Kansas representatives were elected as well as out of the Wiebe church. Twelve points were discussed in a peaceful manner but each group remained a separate body."<sup>19</sup>

At one time the Gnadenau group was visited by Jesse Engle and Isaac Kassel from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The two were representatives of the **River Brethren**, now **Brethren in Christ**. Some of their group had settled at Abilene in 1879 and established a church there and the two came to see how the Krimmer brethren were getting along. The River Brethren were strongly evangelistic and the Gnadenau brethren felt united with the Abilene group in spirit, doctrine, and baptism. The River brethren practiced a kneeling forward form. They were attracted to the Abilene group by their brotherliness, simplicity, and zeal but there were

language and custom differences. The groups fellowshiped with each other, but a merger did not come to pass.\*

On January 28, 1895, the Mennonite Brethren and the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren met in the Springfield church for a united conference. Elder Jacob A. Wiebe was elected as chairman and John F. Harms, secretary. The session resulted in fully recognizing each other and in expressing a desire to work "shoulder to shoulder." Elder Abraham Schellenberg made the close. All indicated by standing that they were in love and peace with each other.<sup>20</sup>

Other merger moves appeared from time to time. In 1898, the Krimmer conference entertained the question: "Do we want to join the **Mission Alliance** church? The answer was negative. In 1908 a proposal to merge with the Mennonite Brethren church was laid away as uncompleted. A 1921 conference question read: "Could we enter into closer unity with the **Wall's** church?" Answer: "It is the sincere wish of the conference to find a way to unite closer." In 1922 a resolution stated, "to take steps so that the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren conference and the **Bruderthaler** conference unite as one." A 1933 conference question asked: "What steps can be taken to strive for a merger with the **Mennonite Brethren** church?" and five years later, in 1938, a similar question reads: "Is it not high time that we as Krimmer Mennonite Brethren conference again make a strong effort to unite with the **Mennonite Brethren** conference?" The answer was to wait until there is more unity. In 1947 the Krimmer conference Year Book reports: "In view of the fact that the **Evangelical Mennonite Brethren** conference is desirous of a union, should we as a conference appoint a committee to consider the issues involved?" A committee was appointed but little progress was made. Later the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren conference took steps to affiliate with the Evangelical Mennonite conference.

As a result of close proximity to each other and inter-church relationships in missions, schools, song festivals, Bible conferences, and evangelistic campaigns, the differences between the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren and the Mennonite Brethren conferences had largely vanished. Intermarriages were constantly in evidence. Former lines of demarcation were getting less important, especially in communities like Gnadenu. Gnadenu church members, living north of Hillsboro had long ago joined the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren church and that congregation contained a good number of former Gnadenu members. The Gnadenu congregation in turn had a number of former Mennonite Brethren members.

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\* Ministers and church members visited with each other. It is known that President Dwight D. Eisenhower's mother, then a member of the Abilene Brethren church, visited the Gnadenu church. One of the sons of Jacob A. Wiebe married a River Brethren member and joined that group. A fanatical trend developed at Abilene which did not appeal to the Gnadenu group. Some farmers posted their farms with Scripture verses. One wrote: "I am saved, sanctified, baptized with fire, and have dynamite." Some spoke of a "firebaptized and dynamited Gospel."



During the last decades there was no friction between the groups and the churches worked together in harmony on various projects, but a feeling developed that the families would prefer to be together in one conference. Other aspects favoring merger explorations were the constant rise of educational needs, the mission program, the Christian literature needs and a desire for a stronger united witness. These and similar factors led both conferences to undertake consolidation moves.

In 1945 the Gnadenu brotherhood voted in favor of uniting with the Mennonite Brethren conference. In 1947 the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren conference appointed a committee "to meet with committees desiring a union." In October, 1949, the committee of Reference and Counsel of the Mennonite Brethren conference submitted to the Krimmer group an invitation of "uniting our spiritual strength into one conference." In July, 1951 the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Committee suggested that the Mennonite Brethren conference "advance a workable and constructive plan" and in the same month the Mennonite Brethren General conference in session in Winkler, Manitoba, voted to present a district merger plan to the sister conference. The **Overture** consisted of two main proposals: <sup>21</sup>

a. That the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Conference join the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church as a District Conference.

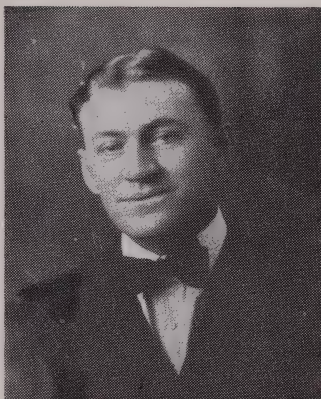
b. That the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Conference voluntarily accept all the privileges and responsibilities, spiritually and materially, as do the other district conferences.

This plan was to remove former merger barriers. The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren conference could keep its mission fields and mission program intact, retain its form of baptism, retain its name, and continue as a unit.

The Overture was presented to the Krimmer conference which proposed instead a **Collaboration** plan. At the 1953 annual conference the Gnadenu church asked for a reconsideration of the proposed Mennonite Brethren District Overture but this failed to carry.

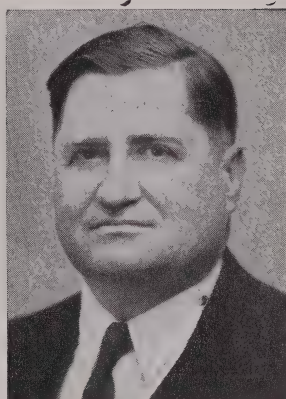
For a number of years the Lehigh Mennonite Brethren congregation had become smaller and the group felt inclined to merge with the Gnadenu congregation. Beginning with July, 1954 the two congregations began to worship together at Gnadenu, at first on a tentative basis, but on November 17, 1954, the united brotherhoods accepted the consolidation stipulations and declared the merger complete. The united group voted to function as the Gnadenu Mennonite Brethren church.<sup>22</sup> The combined membership was one hundred and sixty-five. The consolidation document, signed by the two church councils, ends with a statement from the Overture: "because we have the conviction that such a Union would please our Lord and Master and will enable Him by His spirit to even increase the usefulness of our service and ministry as a testimony to the world in our immediate environment and in the regions beyond."

## Later Gnadenau Church Leaders



Rev. Frank V. Wiebe  
1882-1951

Gnadenau Pastor 1937-1947



Dr. P. R. Lange

Lehigh M. B. Church, 1945-1954  
Gnadenau Church—1955

In 1956 the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren conference reacted favorably to a report that the conference merge with the Mennonite Brethren conference and on October 8, 1957 an official vote was cast which carried by the required two-thirds majority. Specific merger plans were to proceed at the 1958 conferences.<sup>23</sup>

It is much easier to divide than to unite. In Mennonite history and Mennonite circles divisions and schisms have been all too frequent. The historian Friesen states that the "indestructible passion for divisions" has driven many groups apart. Not always have differences arisen from doctrinal matters but sometimes from misunderstandings and a strong Mennonite individualism. For every church and conference it is well to examine itself whether it is building on the only and true foundation. In the comparatively small Mennonite brotherhood there are today some twenty separate Mennonite bodies. Mergers have been few and it will take much grace from God to discern the true eternal values, to relinquish established sentiments, and to effect God-pleasing unions which Christ prayed for.



## Chapter XVI References

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- 2 J. F. Harms, **Geschichte der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde**, p. 19.
- 3 P. M. Friesen, **A. E. M. B.**, p. 242.
- 4 **Ibid**, p. 275.
- 5 J. F. Harms, **Geschichte der M. B.**, p. 26.
- 6 P. M. Friesen, **A. E. M. B.**, p. 234 (complete Protokoll).
- 7 P. A. Wiebe, **Biography of Jacob A. Wiebe**.
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- 9 **Der Wahrheitsfreund**, Volume I, No. 1.
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- 11 **Kansas Historical Quarterly**, Volume XIII.
- 12 **K. M. B. Konferenz Beschleusse**, 1885, pp. 4-5.
- 13 **Ibid**, 1882, point 9.
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- 15 P. A. Wiebe, **B. of J. A. W.**, p. 72.
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- 18 P. A. Wiebe, **Biography of Jacob A. Wiebe**.
- 19 P. M. Friesen, **A. E. M. B.**, Part II, p. 29.
- 20 P. A. Wiebe, **Biography of Jacob A. Wiebe**, p. 24.
- 21 General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1951.
- 22 Gnadenau Church Secretary Record Book. p. 153.
- 23 K. M. B. Conference, **Year Book, 1957**, p. 13.



## CHAPTER XVII

### The Gnadenau Schools

*From a child thou hast known the Scriptures—Paul*

The children of the Gnadenau, Hoffnungstal, and Alexanderfeld villages did not attend the public schools for several years. The immigrants were accustomed to having their own schools. In America too, for the first few years, the school officials permitted the settler children to attend either private or public school. The immigrants were school minded and fortunately had able teachers in their midst. Almost as soon as the Gnadenau village took form they erected their own sod church and school building. In Hoffnungstal and in Alexanderfeld schools were held in private homes.

In Gnadenau, Johann Harder functioned as teacher for the first school terms. He received no pay but had an arrangement with the patrons that each would haul for him a load of building material, either lumber or rocks. The sod school was the first to operate in the Mennonite settlements, but soon other church-sponsored schools were established. In the New Alexanderwohl settlement three schools were started in the winter of 1874. In the Alexanderfeld village, two miles northwest of Gnadenau, Abraham Harms started a school in 1875 and in the same year Johann Flaming opened a school in Hoffnungstal, three miles southwest of Gnadenau. In 1877, Heinrich Wiebe began a school in his own home, one mile west of the Gnadenau village. In 1877, Andreas Flaming taught school in the Gnadenau sod structure and before the school term was completed, the walls caved in and the term was finished in the Franz Groening home. Flaming received a salary of \$20 per month.\*

Several school terms were held in the home of Johannes Harder. During the night, the Harder children slept on school benches pushed together to serve as beds. Early in the morning the room was again converted into school. Harder had taught school in Russia for seven years before emigrating and continued to teach in America for about four more years. He had been elected as minister in 1871.

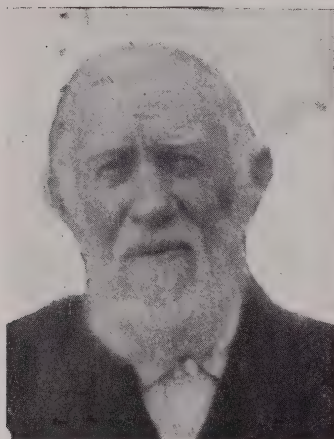
The purpose of the school was, according to Harder, "Because we always had schools in the old country, therefore the different communities wished to begin similar schools in this country, to teach the most essential things in life. The chief purpose, however, was to teach the children the German language and to make them acquainted with the Bible. For this latter reason the Bible was also used as textbook in reading. After the children were

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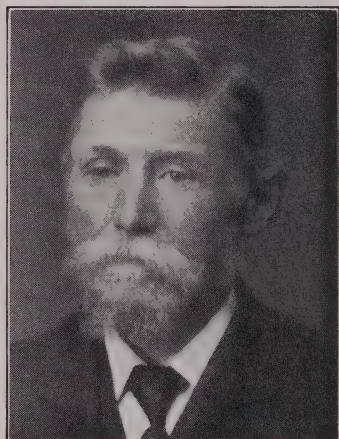
\* Andreas Flaming came to Florence in 1874 and settled in the Gnadenau village in 1876 and took up farming and teaching. He was one of the first to introduce four part singing in the school and in the church. He is credited with having brought some Red Turkey seed wheat from Russia. Later Flaming became a store clerk and merchant. He introduced the double-entry bookkeeping system into the lumberyards of Hillsboro, Lehigh, and Canada.

through the "A B C" and the Fibelklasse, they were promoted to the New Testament class. From this they passed into the Old Testament class. The schools were to prepare and train the children to be Christian young people."<sup>1</sup> Besides Bible and German the pupils were taught arithmetic, geography, penmanship, and singing. The instruction was systematic and thorough. The Marion county school superintendent, Mrs. J. W. Sharon, once visited Harder's school and was so pleased with the work, especially the hearty singing, that she allowed Harder financial aid from the county funds, but this caused so much ill feeling among American neighbors that the church voluntarily decided to pay it back.<sup>2</sup> Each school session, morning as well as afternoon, was opened and closed with song and prayer.

### Pioneer School Teachers



Johann Harder  
1836—1930



Andreas Flaming  
1847—1929

After a few years the immigrant children attended the public schools during the regular school terms and the church schools during the vacation months. The result was that the children advanced rapidly in their training. School laws were lenient and the public schools permitted a good deal of Bible instruction during the regular school terms, but the German vacation schools were continued for many years in Mennonite settlements. The German school usually followed the regular school term. In 1898 there were forty-two privately supported schools in the Kansas Mennonite settlements. The average term was from two to three months and the average salary paid was \$33 per month.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-one of the schools had an average of thirty-five pupils each. In 1886 the Mennonite German Teachers Association was organized and it did much to promote a unified plan for such schools and to foster educational interests among the settlers.

## THE GNADENAU PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Gnadenau village was located in Marion County. The county had been organized in 1860 with Marion Center, a small town without a railroad, as the county seat. Originally the county was of huge size. It included all the area between the present east county line to the Colorado line and the present north county line to the Oklahoma line, an area of 31,734 square miles—a larger area than the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia combined. This area constituted the original boundaries of School District No. 1, of Marion county. In 1871 School District No. 11 was organized, originally a large district. The Gnadenau village was in District No. 11.

When the settlers came in 1874 there was a small public school just east of the village site called the **Risley** school. It is described as a "small, neatly painted building." The 1873 report is the first report on record for District No. 11, and it states that the district's school population, five to twenty years, was thirteen but that there were twenty-two pupils enrolled in school, with an average attendance of fifteen. Possibly some adults or pupils from outside of the district also attended. There were two teachers—one male and one female—and the report is signed by H. C. W. Risley. The school was located on section 12.

After the immigrants had settled, another public school building was erected on section 10, one and one-half miles west of the Risley school. The land was donated by Jacob Friesen, a Mennonite immigrant. The two schools were now spoken of as the **English East** half district and the **English West** half district. The reason for two schools was because the population had increased rapidly and pupils did not have to walk so far. A school report, dated July 31, 1875, gives these figures: "Total school population, five years to twenty-one, sixty-seven. Pupils enrolled, twenty-five. Average daily attendance, sixteen." The reason for the small attendance was because the settlers had their own church schools and their children did not yet attend the public school.

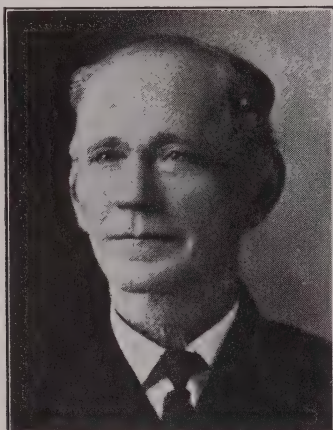
Soon the public schools began to compete with the church schools and from about 1877 on the pupils of the Gnadenau settlers attended the public schools during three or four winter months and the church schools during the vacation period. This larger attendance is reflected in a District No. 11 report of August, 1879, which reports two teachers with a total of one hundred and twenty-four pupils. (The report evidently includes both the East and West schools.)

When the immigrants came to Kansas the requirements for education in public schools were very low and the school laws very lenient. The people of the state were more interested in securing thrifty settlers than in passing and enforcing stringent school laws. In 1874 the law required that any child between the ages of eight and fourteen should be taught by a competent instructor for at least twelve weeks, unless the parent was not able to clothe such child properly, by reason of poverty, or the child's bodily or mental condition was such as to prevent his attendance at school. The law



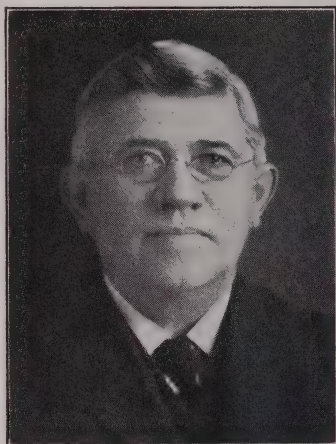
did not specify when a teacher was "competent," and it left many attendance loopholes.

Soon some of the young immigrant teachers took very lenient county examinations, after having attended the English school for some weeks. They did this in order to take their private schools



Rev. Heinrich Banman

Took teachers examination the second year after immigrating. Taught in New Alexanderwohl school. Looked upon teaching as a mission.



Henry Dalke

Volunteered to teach without pay. Began teaching in public schools in 1876 in the Canton community. His enrollment rose up to 150. His first year's salary was \$20 per month.

into the public school buildings, and then receive financial aid from the county. In Gnadenu, Andreas Flaming reports of a plan to engage two teachers, one to teach English and one to teach German, both to be paid by the county. This plan, however, met opposition and was soon dropped.

In 1885, District No. 11, reported a school population of one hundred and twenty-three between the ages of five and twenty-one. The district had an enrollment of seventy-eight pupils with an average attendance of forty-two. The school term had now been lengthened to seven months and the teacher's salary was \$50 per month. John J. Fast was the teacher.

Eventually the East and West public schools had again been united and a frame school building had been erected in the center of the Gnadenu village on the south side of the village road near the Gnadenu church building. In 1919 the wood school building was replaced by a modern two room and basement brick structure, costing \$9,000.

For many years the Gnadenu public school was one of the most active and progressive school districts in Marion county. The peak enrollment in the brick building reached seventy pupils with two teachers. Later the attendance declined steadily. In 1935, District No. 11, had an enrollment of twenty pupils; in 1945,

the enrollment had dropped to fourteen pupils, and in 1950 it had dropped to eight pupils. As a consequence, Gnadenu District No. 11, found it expedient to discontinue the school and to send its pupils to the nearby Hillsboro elementary school. In 1956 the Gnadenu brick school building and the school grounds were sold at public auction to a private individual.

School District No. 11, was abandoned for three reasons: (1) As a result of modern farm methods, many small farms had disappeared. (2) The families are not as large as they were formerly. (3) The progressive elementary school system of Hillsboro offered excellent educational instruction.

### Gnadenu School—District No. 11

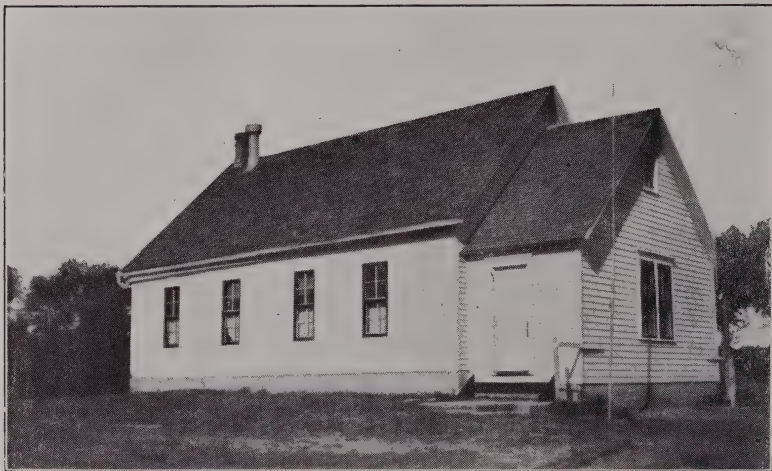


During the eighty years of its existence the Gnadenu school has made notable educational and cultural contributions. Out of its ranks have come elementary, high school, college, and university teachers, missionaries, ministers, physicians, nurses, merchants, bankers, writers, farmers, and housewives. The following is an incomplete list of some of the product of the Gnadenu schools. Those marked with an asterisk are no longer living.

D. E. Harder\*, minister and teacher; P. C. Hiebert, minister and teacher; Jacob J. Friesen\*, miller and farmer; P. J. Wiebe\*, minister and teacher; Abraham C. Eitzen, physician; Abraham A. Groening, university teacher; Abraham E. Hiebert, physician; George A. Flaming, grain merchant; John K. Hiebert\*, elder and farmer; Jacob J. Wiebe\*, editor and writer; Jacob Z. Wiebe\*, teacher and historian; H. H. Flaming, minister and farmer; Herbert C. Eitzen, dentist; John S. Friesen\*, grain merchant; Dwight Wiebe, MCC Pax administrator; Abraham Pankratz\*, deacon and farmer; John F. D. Wiebe\*, immigration agent; Cor. D. Klassen, farmer and teacher; John J. Friesen\*, elder and farmer; John Barkman, minister and missionary; Daniel Hiebert, physician; John Harder, minister and teacher; Jacob G. Barkman\*, minister and farmer; Mrs. Anna Kaiser, nurse; Joelle Hiebert, physician; Peter F. Friesen, banker; Frank Groening, merchant; J. Mark Hiebert, physician; Mrs. F. V. Wiebe, teacher and missionary; August R. Ebel, teacher and artist; Harold T. Wiebe, university teacher; D. R. Hoepfner, optometrist; Henry Schenkofsky, minister and poet; Dietrich C. Eitzen, teacher and farmer; Homer L. Hie-

bert, radiologist; Jacob E. Friesen, deacon and farmer; Peter W. Claassen\*, university teacher; Abr. Dalke, teacher and farmer; Mrs. J. V. Friesen, college teacher; John W. Claassen, deacon and farmer; Albert Bartel\*, teacher and mail carrier; J. E. Dalke, teacher and minister; John W. Block, farmer; Liesa Schultz\*, college teacher.

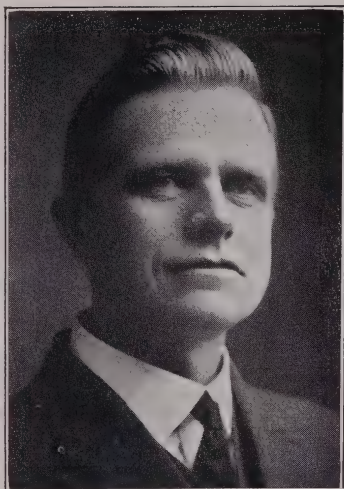
### Hope Valley School, District No. 75



The Hoffnungsthal public school, District No. 75, was built in 1879 and is one of the earliest school districts in Mennonite communities. The **Guide to Hillsboro** states: "In 1879 Hope Valley District No. 75 was organized with 116 pupils, and school hours from 8 A. M. to 6 P. M. In their dinner pails they had rye bread with sorghum and black barley coffee." District No. 75 has been enlarged and is still in operation with about twenty pupils in attendance.

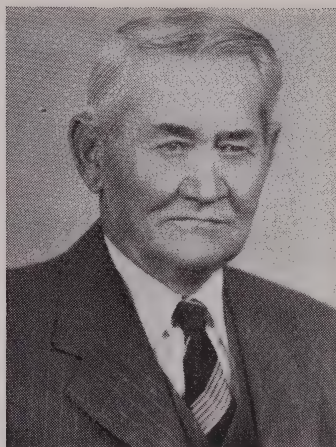


# Gnadenau School Products



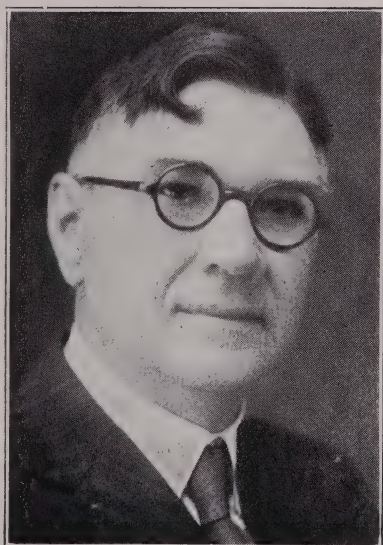
David E. Harder  
1873-1930

Gnadenau pupil and teacher, College instructor and conference moderator. Immigrated in 1874



Jacob Z. Wiebe  
1869-1953

Gnadenau pupil and teacher, minister and historian. Immigrated in 1876.



Peter F. Friesen, President of the Hillsboro First National Bank. Grandson of the Gnadenau farmer and miller Jacob Friesen.



Abraham Clement Eitzen, M. D. Respected Hillsboro physician since 1923. Post Graduate of Medicine at Berlin and Vienna.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Reflections by Mennonite Educators

#### Essentials and Nonessentials by Cor. H. Wedel

Turning to the narrower limits of our own denominations we notice, to our regret, that the spirit of peace and love was often wanting. In Holland there arose various branches among the Mennonites. In essentials they were united but they could not agree on matters of less importance. Should one have hooks or eyes or buttons on his clothes, or ribbons or buckles on the shoes—such matters received too much importance. Church discipline was taken very seriously. Many preachers, like Menno Simons, were very severe; others, however thought that one could easily be too severe. On the one hand it was profitable to discuss such matters, for it helped to increase knowledge; on the other hand, it is to be regretted that separations took place because of things of minor importance. However, everything pertaining to Christianity was taken very seriously. For this reason they were bitterly attacked by the clergy of the State Church. They were regarded as dangerous people, because they refused military service and would not take the oath. Many conferences were held with Mennonites regarding these things, but as their belief was definitely grounded on the Scriptures, they after all had to be left in peace.

When churches shut themselves up against all new movements they run the risk to shrink down to mere narrow minded conventicles, and bright and ambitious young people find too little stimulus and satisfaction in their church activities. The church ought never to reach the position where it may fold its hands in ease as if there was nothing more for itself to investigate, or to change and combine the good new with the good old. Many of our young people acquire a very comprehensive education in other schools, often in such, who have little or nothing of our characteristics. There is reason to fear that they will lose much of the sound sympathy with the mother church if these outside influences are not balanced by more convincing arguments at home. Will the church know how to care for an adequate interest for their own—own schools—own literature, own work for the Lord, own progress in the church? It must be clear to all that a continuous returning to the fountains of life must remain a growing need—always to acquire anew what was inherited, to keep and make fruitful what has been granted in general and in special knowledge—that no one may take our crown. (*History of the Mennonites.*)

An example of over-emphasis of nonessentials:

Those with hooks and eyes, will be saved by God;

Those with pockets and buttons, will be seized by the devil.

P. M. Friesent states: "In the name of 'cleansing' brethren were thrown out of church on account of buttons or hooks or on account of a long or short beard, or because of 'Shiboleth' or 'sib'."

## THE PRICE OF AN EDUCATION

A Profile of D. E. Harder by M. S. Harder

As one observes the splendid educational opportunities offered to modern youth, it is difficult to imagine a time when an education could be obtained only by a terrific sacrifice, effort and determination. Before father was old enough to enter the first grade, he was already begging to attend, especially since the village school was conducted in grandfather's house.

His first years of schooling constituted three months of English and three months of German instruction. After completing the courses offered in the village school, Father was at home helping his mother for a number of years. During these years his yearning for more learning grew until he began to prevail upon his parents to allow him to attend the Hillsboro (Kansas) High School. I think it can be truly said that many of the early pioneers were much opposed to advanced education. Grandfather shared such a feeling at that time. Finally, after much pleading, Father was permitted to attend the local high school.

At the age of seventeen, Father contracted for his first teaching job in a small, rural school. Father was a student at Bethel College from 1898 to 1900 and he enrolled twice at McPherson College. Grandfather thought best that he cook his own meals out of food brought from home each Monday morning. Toward the end of the week, the food was either eaten or unfit to eat. On several occasions Father was even forced to walk home—a distance of thirty miles.

When Father was a rural-route mail carrier in Oklahoma, he enrolled in the study of French and Spanish, in the local normal school. While his ponies trotted wearily over the thirty mile route, he studied his vocabularies, declensions, and conjugations.

It may be truly said that Father was a student all his life. Every summer when he could get away from the work he would attend some state university for short summer terms. Little by little, he managed to earn his master's degree, and before his death he had completed his doctor's dissertation. The list of studies pursued during Father's early school years shows that he must have prepared for the ministry. But his church at that time expressed a very definite suspicion of all young men with college experience. Hence he was given no encouragement from his church leaders.

His religion possessed a reach that extended beyond denominational or theological "isms." Father had a deep concern for the salvation of souls, but he could not get excited about differences in baptism or schools of thought concerning the millenium, or the identification of the Antichrist. His scholarly nature led him to seek the truth in these areas, but he was unwilling to claim possession of the final answers. I have always been convinced that in the building of a true concept of God, Father reached genuine greatness. (*Mennonite Life*, July 1946.)



## LACK OF MENNONITE CHURCH GROWTH

by Jacob Z. Wiebe

The early settlements were made by people who came here to find a new home where they could live and prosper according to the dictates of their conscience. The farms they bought were comparatively small, although the Santa Fe advised not to buy less than a quarter section, but in many cases this was ignored. One extreme case was where eight families settled on a half section with forty acres each. This was soon changed to four farms with eighty acres each. But had they listened to advice many hardships could have been avoided. This holds true in other places too, had the U. S. government given the first settlers in the western part of Kansas, 320 acres instead of 160 they could have had a double chance to stay, as it was, most of them had to leave.

The Mennonites have not had the growth that other churches have had. P. M. Friesen tells us that the Mennonite churches in western Europe in 1700 counted about one hundred and forty thousand. By about 1800 they had decreased to about forty thousand. They had lost one thousand members every year; causes were persecutions and government restrictions as to possession of property. Prussian Mennonites could not possess land that they had rescued from river swamps, and if it did not pass into Mennonite hands it could not be redeemed. This compelled the landless families to seek employment wherever it could be found and they became isolated and lost their identity.

The August 1950, "Christian Herald" reports a census of the Christians in the United States. The population of the "United States is given as 150,808,000 of which 54% are Christians or persons that have their names on some church record. In comparison is given the 1880 census and at that time there were only 20% Christians a gain of 34%. The largest group are the Baptists with over twelve million members. The membership of six groups of Mennonites is stated as 155,241.

The Mennonites have a history of over 400 years, the Baptist about the same, the Methodists of about 200 years. The Nazarene church with less than a 50-year history shows a membership of 220,000. It is evident that some churches have been more active than others. Maybe St. Paul would not have believed that it would take nineteen centuries to convert one third of the world population to Christianity. With his zeal it would not have taken that long.

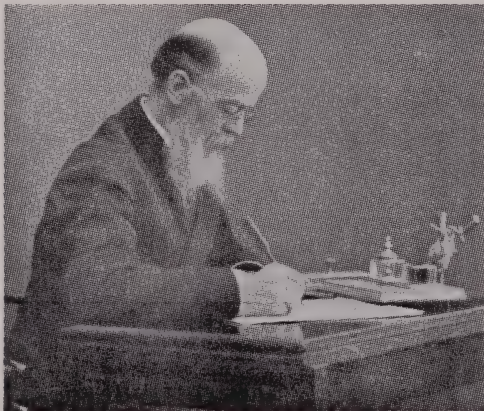
In Kansas City I looked through the church directory and found that there were several hundred Baptist churches and as many Methodist; but no Mennonite church, and that is true of many other large cities. Many of our young people who work in cities join other churches and are lost as Mennonite members. And maybe we Mennonites are guilty of sins of omission without recognizing it. (*Hillsboro Journal*, December 14, 1950.)

## WINNING EDUCATION FOR CHRIST

Peter M. Friesen

Two death enemies have constantly threatened Mennonitism: the dull self-righteous **Obscurantism** or education hatred,—and the shallow intellectual **Rationalism** or **Deism**, which places education above everything. The first enemy is like a morass and we have waded deep in this mud and some of our brethren in America among the "Old Mennonites" and the "Russian Mennonites" are still in the morass. The second enemy is like a barren, parched desert, Holland and some other Mennonite groups in Germany are losing their life's power in this desert and will die sooner or later.

We firmly believe that a living faith and true knowledge are two forms of one and the same godly truth. But so that faith, soul, body, and education are in correct relation towards each other—as the clothes to the body. Because our fathers in general, despised education, especially for preachers, they sank slowly into the morass and help had to come from faithful outside Christians who respected a living faith and education: through Moravian Brethren, Pietists, and others.



Peter Martinovitch Friesen—1849-1914  
Teacher—Minister—Historian

There is for us, who "contend for the faith" but one solution: To win education for Christ and to place it in His service; like Moses and Daniel won the "wisdom of the Egyptians" and the Chaldeans for the service of Jehovah. May we inspire youth for education and the arts but teach them to know Jesus as the "most glorious of all" and the "fulness of him that filleth all in all"; and witness that we have in Him all joy and power in life, as well as life and comfort in death, and that we have in Him the foundation of all that is worthwhile in our social, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual life. May we realize full well that the "world," is at enmity with God: but also that "God so loved the world, that he gave his

only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish"; may we be in front in educational and occupational ability and be of those that cry day and night to God in prayer!

Therefore you faithful among the educated—up for the battle against obscurantism and ignorance as well as against unchristian, sickly, intellectualism and libertine worldliness. Our ideal is a Christianity, the "godliness" that is "profitable to all things" and furnished unto all good works" and has the "promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

**In "this" we "will conquer!"**

For us only such a school has value. The "morass" and the "desert" to us are abominable.

## ONE VINE BUT MANY BRANCHES

By C. Henry Smith

There is perhaps no other religious denomination that in proportion to its numbers has been separated into so many different branches as the American Mennonites. This is the result of several causes. First of all the Mennonites have always been individualistic in their thinking. While the Catholic church member may depend on his priest as the source of his spiritual instruction, and the members of other state churches upon their ecclesiastical authorities, the Mennonites find their instruction by themselves in the Bible. This independent, personal search for the Truth makes for a variety of interpretations.

The Mennonites came to this country at different periods of time, and from widely scattered European regions, where each settlement or national group had developed differences in social and religious practices. These differences were all imported to America, where again they were perpetuated in isolated groups with but slight religious intercourse with one another.

It must be remembered too, that under the free skies of America, any aggressive leader can get a following, no matter how extreme or how peculiar are his views. Several small factions now forgotten were of this character. Most others represented honest differences of opinion. Not all people are of like temperament. Some are susceptible to emotional appeals; others to intellectual emphases. This psychological difference has been the cause of several divisions within the church, particularly during the middle of the century, when a wave of religious fervor pervaded all Protestant church bodies.

The American Mennonites have been slow to drop well tried religious practices in favor of newer and untried methods as these made their appearance from time to time. Since there are two extremes to every movement, social or religious, there were always those who thought the church was moving too slowly, others thought it moved too fast. And so as the social order changes several new wings of the church made their appearance. Among the new ventures that became sources of controversy were the use



of the English language in worship, Sunday Schools, prayer meetings, evening meetings, and the mission enterprise, new and changing style of dress, the use of new inventions and a more liberal affiliation with the non-Mennonite social and religious world.

It will thus be seen that it was not usually differences in fundamental Christian beliefs nor Mennonite doctrines but rather variations in certain lesser social and religious practices or emphases that account for the twenty odd varieties of Mennonitism in America.

### Mennonite Bodies in the United States and in Canada

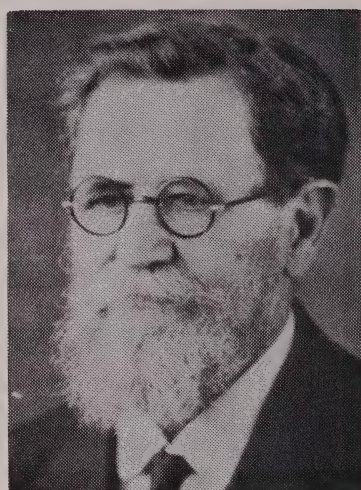
Body	U. S	Canada	Total
Mennonite .....	70,513	6,586	77,396
General Conference .....	35,764	14,005	49,769
Mennonite Brethren .....	11,095	12,967	24,062
Old Order Amish.....	16,794	260	17,054
Old Order Mennonites.....	3,887	1,915	5,802
Church of God in Christ.....	4,161	1,439	5,600
M. B. C. (Pa.).....	4,635		4,635
Sommerfelder .....		3,785	3,785
Beachy Amish .....	2,677		2,677
Evangelical M. B.....	1,564	936	2,500
E. M. (Kleine Gemeinde).....	25	1,900	1,925
Old Colony .....		2,155	2,155
Evangelical Mennonite .....	2,210		2,210
Rudnerweide .....		1,824	1,824
Chortitz .....		1,408	1,408
Krimmer M. B. ....	1,527	176	1,703
Reformed .....	662	218	880
Stauffer .....	357		357
Hutterites .....	2,900	7,560	9,460

In 1956 North America had approximately 215,000 baptized Mennonites, with a total of about 300,000.

# Mennonite Historians



Cornelius H. Wedel  
1860-1910  
Teacher-Minister-Historian



John F. Harms  
1855-1945  
Editor-Minister-Historian



Abraham H. Unruh  
Chilliwack, B. C.  
Minister-Historian



C. Henry Smith  
1875-1948  
Teacher-Banker-Historian

## CHAPTER XIX

### Significant Contributions

#### THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH IDEAL

*I will build my church—Christ*

The Apostolic church represented the newly **selected** in contrast to the chosen people of the Old Testament. This selection was a voluntary choice and was brought about by personal belief in Christ, followed by baptism. Gradually, however, the church became a hierarchic institution, but the apostolic pattern was kept alive by small groups. In the sixteenth century the Anabaptists revived the apostolic ideal, based on the Bible as the sole authority.

From the Anabaptists the Mennonites accepted the ideal of an apostolic church brotherhood. Dr. Theodore Wedel describes the Mennonite parish life as the "glory of the Mennonite tradition as the New Testament itself describes it: A community living by the sermon on the mount. This has been rare in Christian history. With all the errors and sins, the Mennonite communities of the first four hundred years have at least attempted such a life, and they have not altogether failed."

"Indeed as we think back—to our fathers and father's fathers,—are we not stirred with memories of a beauteous Christian social life? I at least am so stirred. We hear much these days of Communism. Communism—not according to the gospel of Karl Marx, but instead according to the Gospel of St. Matthew—has been known to the Mennonite tradition for hundreds of years. This Christian communal life knew nothing of class war or dictatorship of proletariat. It was a communal life of brotherhood under the awesome eye of a Father in heaven. Even its forms of worship witnessed to it. The Holy Communion was a sacrament of a holy brotherhood. No one dared to share in the sacred meal of fellowship with a quarrel against his Christian brother unrepented and unconfessed. The Mennonites could witness to pacifism because pacifism began at home—in the family and in the parish. Where else, indeed, can it well begin, if it is not to be an empty word. No Mennonite parish was perfect, of course, but can you readily find in Christian history more beautiful examples of the Christian community, of the New Testament vision of the Christian parish as a colony of heaven, as a cell of the kingdom of God? 'I beseech you,' says St. Paul, 'to walk worthily of the calling wherewith you were called.'"\*

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\* T. Wedel, *Bethel College Bulletin*, November 18, 1938.)



## THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCEPT

*The truth shall make you free—Christ*

Religious toleration and freedom of conscience have been dominant thoughts of Anabaptist and Mennonite teaching. The New Testament church of the first centuries was not a hierarchy but its ruling authority was vested in the Spirit of Christ in His followers. Not the State nor the priest wielded authority in matters of religion but the scripturally enlightened conscience of the believer.

When the church became powerful, religious toleration vanished and freedom of conscience was denied to its followers. The Church allowed little personal opinion and its adherents were absolved from Bible interpretation. The ecclesiastical authorities, the pope and the priest, were to be the sources of interpretation, revelation, and instruction.

The Reformers taught that the Scriptures and Faith are the cornerstones of salvation. Christians were to read the Bible and to find their instructions in the Scriptures and in an enlightened conscience. When called before the Emperor at Worms, Luther refused to retract because, "it is not advisable to do anything against conscience." The Waldensians and Anabaptists had always contended for religious toleration and freedom of conscience.

From their beginning the Mennonites have held to freedom of religion. This concept implies freedom of the individual to make decisions; and personal responsibility for one's choices. Under God, man is a free being to will and to choose and in matters of religion there must be no compulsion. Religious toleration and Conscience freedom have for centuries been cherished convictions of the Mennonite faith. C. Henry Smith found that in these areas the Mennonites were pioneers. He says:\*

I had never known much of Mennonite origins. I had always thought of Mennonites as an obscure, peculiar people, with strange, unpopular practices. A good, honest, and thrifty people of course, but with little influence in the world and with little bearing upon the currents of world movements. I never expected their deeds to be recorded in the books of either secular or religious history. To discover, therefore, that they were pioneers in the rise of religious toleration, and that they were the spiritual forefathers of both, the Baptists and the congregationalists, as well as the earliest of all modern peace societies, was a revelation to me as surprising as pleasing. My respect for the religion of my forefathers was greatly enhanced. I no longer needed to apologize for my humble faith. The real contribution of the Mennonites to the great cause of religious toleration and world peace ought to be given wider publicity, I thought."

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\*From *Education of the Mennonite Country Boy*.

## THE CHRISTIAN HOME EMPHASIS

*Let them learn first to show piety at home—St. Paul*

All agree that the **Home** is the stronghold of society but everyone knows that in spite of this generally accepted premise there is an alarming breakdown of home and family life. Lawlessness, juvenile delinquency, immorality, and divorces are steadily increasing and it is clear that there is a great deal of moral and social decay rampant. Statistical evidences are shocking and it is obvious that the broken home and the undisciplined child threaten the very foundations of society. The cure has not been found in laws, nor in education, nor in social measures. The evidence points to the **Christian home** as the only solution.

Anabaptists and Mennonites have always emphasized the sacredness of the Christian home and family. This grew out of the belief that the Christian must follow the teachings of the New Testament in all practical life situations. Christ's and the Apostle's teachings were the norms for the home, for discipline, for marriage, for divorce, and for other social problems. The Anabaptist tradition is a home as a family unit where a family altar is practiced and where the child grows up with a sense of "belonging" and is trained to become a useful member of society. It is a home where the marriage tie is held sacred, insoluble, and inviolable.

One writer\* says: "Divorce and remarriage have been practically unknown among Mennonites."\*\* These people have believed that Jesus meant what He said when He spoke the words: 'What therefore God has joined together let no man separate.' These words allow no trifling with the sacred institution, but only for discipline and consecrated living. The foundations of society itself are soon weakened where the sanctity of the marriage tie is suffered to become unstable. The real cure has to be concerned with the personal life and the character of the people who get married. It has to do with the ideals, beliefs, and convictions they hold regarding the fundamental things of life. The most stable home and the most efficient functioning of the home is possible only where husband and wife are of the same faith and religious practice, holding the same ideals for their home and family life. Mennonites have fostered the ideal that the home is not complete without children. This emphasis has contributed not a little to the stability of the Mennonite family life."

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\* Edward Yoder in **Mennonites and Their Heritage**.

\*\* A study in regard to divorces among Mennonites in Marion County, Kansas revealed that during fifty years, 1874 to 1924, there had appeared twenty-two divorce cases but each couple had left their church prior to the divorce.

## THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE BELIEF

*Love your enemies—Christ*

Traditionally the Mennonite churches are known as "Historic Peace" churches. This connotation has not come lightly but as a result of persecutions, nomadic wanderings, and as a defying of the powers of the state when conscience matters were involved.

Their belief that Christians cannot participate in war is based on the teachings of Christ and the sacredness of human life. God, as Creator, can give life and He alone can take it. They believe that the instructions of Christ lend no sanction whatever to hate, violence and war. War is the supreme denial of all that Christ taught and of everything that He stood for. His kingdom is "not of this world." His weapons are **spiritual** and not carnal. His program and method to propagate it has nothing in common with war and militarism. Instead of hate, Christ proposes **love**; instead of revenge, **forgiveness**; instead of strife, **peace**, instead of law, **mercy**; instead of pride, **meekness**; instead of violence, **nonresistance**; instead of carnal weapons, the "Sword of the Spirit." They believe that these teachings are not only to be lauded as a code of desirable ethics, but they must be part of the regenerated and lived in peacetime as well as in wartime.

They agree with the humanitarian that war is wasteful, destructive, cruel, and futile, but their inability to take part in military matters goes much deeper—because it is un-Christian and contrary to God's Word and Will.

From its inception the Anabaptists accepted this position: Grebel, 1524, "True Christians use neither worldly sword nor engage in war"; Marpeck, 1544, "All bodily, worldly, carnal, earthly fighting conflicts, and wars are annulled and abolished"; Riedeman, 1545, "In this kingdom all worldly warfare has ended"; Menno Simons, 1550, "The regenerated do not go to war nor engage in strife." "We shall not believe" the Anabaptists said, "that the Sermon on the Mount or any other vision that Christ had is only a heavenly vision meant but to keep His followers in tension until the last great day, but we shall practice what He taught, believing that where He walked we can by His grace follow in His steps."<sup>1</sup>

In this faith the Mennonites have antedated the Quakers and Dunkards by more than one hundred years. This belief, is not only a negative attitude but much more a positive activity—to preserve life, and to minister to mankind with deeds of love. As the "Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them," so His followers must be engaged in basic types of service to their fellow men.

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<sup>1</sup> H. S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*.



## THE RURAL LIFE TRADITION

*The ploughman needs to plow in hope—St. Paul*

Farming has been the economic basis of Mennonite heritage. The Mennonites believed that farming offered the best opportunity to lead a "quiet and peaceable" life. Capitalistic ventures, speculation, and high finance were frowned upon and church members were encouraged to work with their hands and to stay close to the soil. Intolerance and persecution repeatedly drove the Mennonites out of more populated districts resulting in their withdrawal to remote countrysides. As refugee groups they reclaimed poor and isolated areas and thus became experts in soil conservation.

Dr. Cornelius Krahn states that "The Bible and the Plow have in a unique way become the symbols of Mennonites who, since the early days of their history, have emphasized certain character-



istics in connection with both of these and have linked them together on their global journey, holding as it were, the Bible in the right hand as the constant guide for life and with the left guiding the plow as pioneers and tillers of the soil. . .

"In Holland where religious toleration was granted first after a period of severe persecution, they found places of refuge in swampy, uninhabited regions where others did not choose to settle. Draining the swamps of the Vistula Delta and breaking the sod of the steppes of the Ukraine and later in turn the prairie states and provinces, they followed the truth found in the Bible not wavering in their Christian convictions, and as tillers of the soil they still continue as pioneers in the plateaus of Mexico, the mountains of Brazil, and the plains of Uruguay and the Chaco of Paraguay.

"Out of the missionaries of the Word and blood witnesses of the sixteenth century they turned by necessity into missionaries of the plow, still serving the same Creator and Redeemer who sent them forth to fulfill His commandment. We pity him who does not fully appreciate this phase of our history—,who does not realize that these people of the soil constitute God's best reservoir from which he calls forth his missionaries of the Word to go out into the uttermost parts of the earth to proclaim the Gospel of salvation. . ."

## THE ANTI-SLAVERY CONVICTION

*No longer a mere slave—a beloved brother—St. Paul*

Slavery has existed for many centuries but with the expansion of commerce a regular slave-procuring trade was established and thousands of prisoners of war were sold into slavery. Christianity encouraged masters to treat slaves more humanely, however, although "religious influence brought about the milder treatment of slaves, the State Church, made no attempt to abolish the system. The enslavement of heathen people was sanctioned by the church, and there were many church slaves."\*

Soon after the discovery of America the slave traffic spread to the colonies. The slave was the personal property of the plantation owner and his treatment depended upon the will and whim of the master. Slaves were sold at auction and there were many instances of shameful treatment of slaves and atrocious cruelty towards them.



Slavery Scene

At Versailles, Kentucky, J. L. Moss offered the following at auction, March 1, 1849, to wit:

One pair of oxen, Two milch cows, Two ox carts, 32 gallons Miller whiskey (7 years old), 299 gallons apple brandy, Two spinning wheels, Six head fox hounds, all smooth mouthed but one, One 40-gallon still.

At the same time I will sell my six negro slaves—Two men, 35 and 49 years old, Two boys, Two mulatto wenches, 30 and 40 years old. Will sell all to the same party as will not separate them.

Terms: Cash on hand or note to draw 4 per cent interest.\*\*

\* The Family Encyclopedia, see "Slavery."

\*\* The 109-year-old Sale Bill is owned by George Wilson of Wichita, Kansas.

In 1662, Peter Cornelius Plockhoy, a Mennonite from Holland, established a colony in Delaware based on a minute set of rules: All were to have equal rights; there were to be free schools, and there was to be no slavery in this colony.

The first protest against slavery came from Mennonites and Mennonite Quakers. It was recorded in Germantown, Pennsylvania on April 18, 1688.

"Those who hold slaves are no better than the Turks, for we have heard that most of such Negroes are brought hither against their will and that many of them are stolen. They are black, but we cannot understand how that can justify making slaves any more than if they were white. We have been told to do unto others as we wish them to do unto us. In this land there exists freedom of conscience: that is right and sensible; but this freedom also belongs to the body, unless it was a criminal, which is an altogether different matter. But that people are captured, brought here, and against their will are sold, we protest. In Europe many suffer oppression for conscience sake; here people are oppressed on account of the color of their skin. What worse lot could befall us in this world if we were captured, stolen, and sold as slaves in a strange land, the husbands parted from wife and children? For us it is a terrible thought that people in Pennsylvania are now enslaved like this.

Signed: Pastorious, Hendricks, Dirk Op den Graaf,  
Abraham Op den Graaf. (Only Pastorious did not  
formally belong to the Mennonites.)

In 1715 the English Quakers finally also declared themselves against the oversea slave traffic. In 1780 the state of Pennsylvania passed laws which pressed for the complete abolition of slavery.

Finally church groups and civic minded people realized that slavery was un-Christian and inhuman, and a great cry arose against the vile traffic. Yet it took almost two hundred years, from the time of the Mennonite protest, until the **Emancipation Proclamation** was issued in 1863. This proclamation freed some 4,000,000 negro slaves and put an end to slavery in the United States. Of the church groups the Mennonites were the first to raise their voice in protest against this wicked and sinful practice.



## Leaders and Contributors in Various Fields



Peter H. Wedel, 1865-1897

First missionary candidate among the immigrants. Missionary to Cameroon, Africa.



H. W. Lohrenz, 1878-1945

Promoter of education in Mennonite Brethren circles. President of Tabor College for twenty-three years.



H. D. Penner

Founder of the Preparatory School movement. Conducted a Secondary school in Hillsboro from 1897-1913.



Peter C. Hiebert

Relief worker in Russia in 1922. For twenty-five years chairman of Mennonite Central Committee.

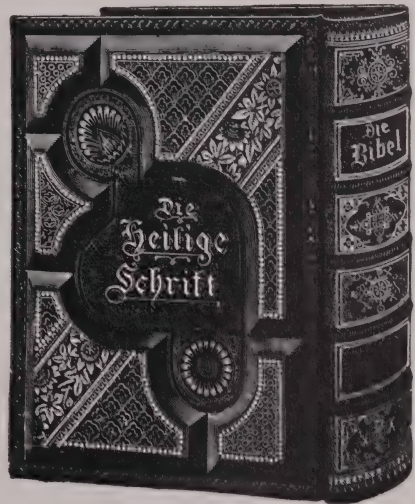
## CHAPTER XX

### This They Believe

*Other foundation can no man lay—St. Paul*

In spite of persecutions, wanderings, divisions, and dissensions the Mennonites have believed in ten cardinal principles of faith. By emphasizing these tenets of faith they made their unique contribution. Repeatedly they accepted persecutions, exiles, and wanderings rather than surrender or compromise on these Beliefs.

1. Mennonites have consistently held to the concept that the Bible is the sole and **Supreme** authority of faith and practice. It is the inspired Word of God and the revealed Will of God. Its authority goes beyond that of men, state or nation. If conflicts arise between the demands of men or the state, and the Word of God, then they believed: "We ought to obey God rather than men."



2. They believed in the **Separation of Church and State**. The church is a spiritual kingdom "not of this world," and it must remain free and distinct from political entanglements and the temporal aims of the state. The Reformers continued with having the Church and the state united. The Mennonites could not accept this. They believed that the functions of the state are secular only and that the church must be free to practice and preach the Gospel of Christ.

3. They believed the Bible teaches **Baptism of the Believer** on personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Son of God. On this basic principle they all agree although differing widely in baptismal forms.

4. They believed the Christian **cannot take part in war**. They accepted a quite literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount and the entire New Testament. Christ's words, "Resist not evil," "turn the other cheek," and "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword," they believed, meant just that. The secular state may feel called on to wage war but the follower of Christ can practice only love. They believed that the solution for the ills of the world is not force but love.

5. They believed in the **solemnity of a man's word** and refused to take the oath. Christ said, "Swear not at all" and "Let your conversation be Yea, Yea: and Nay, Nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." The Apostle James said: "But above all these things, brethren swear not." On bases like these they believed that the Christian's word is solemn and that the oath is forbidden.

6. They believed in **Nonconformity**. A Christian's way of life they held was different from that of an unbeliever. A Christian is to conform his life to the pattern of Christ. Pride, worldly pleasures, and the practices of a godless society are to be shunned and the believer is to live a "newness" of life.

7. They believed in church **Discipline**. The church must not judge, but it must guard and protect its brotherhood from dead element. It must remain pure in order to be respected and to keep an effective testimony. Mennonite churches have differed greatly in severity of discipline but all accepted the words of Christ in Matthew 18, as basic.

8. They believed in **Simplicity**, in piety and devotion in the home and in the church. Simplicity in the economic life, in habits and in dress. Again groups have differed widely in what constitutes godly simplicity but in general all Mennonite churches have felt that avoidance of display and of extravagant habits was a fitting outward expression of an inner humility and of a living faith.

9. They believed in the **Home, the School, and the Church**. They were home-loving people who cherished the family ties. Wherever they went they built homes, schools, and churches. Often their homes were simple, their schools primitive, and their church a gathering place in a home or school but always they recognized in some measure the need of all three. They cultivated the joys of home and family ties, the functions of the school, and the spiritual power of church fellowship. Their spiritual, cultural, and social life centered in these three institutions.

10. They believed in **Religious Freedom**—the concept that a Christian has a right to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience. This has been a dominant principle of their faith for more than four hundred years. Every man is personally responsible to God, he is a free being to choose, and in matters of belief there must be no compulsion. Laws must be obeyed, governments respected, and civil duties conscientiously performed.

These were high standards and often not carried out in practice. Nevertheless, these beliefs the Mennonites accepted, cherished, and wandered from country to country to protect. Few have denied that they are scriptural and basically sound. All agree that "they that say such things declare plainly that **they seek a country.**"



## APPENDIX

### Other Significant Migrations

*Dwelling in Tabernacles—Hebrews*

#### 1. Migrations to Pennsylvania—1662

The first attempt to start a Mennonite colony in America was made in 1662 when Pieter Cornelius Plockhoy from Holland settled with twenty-four families in the state of Delaware. The colony was to be a social Utopia with minute laws for religious toleration, free schools, no slavery, and equal rights for all. Yet, its regulations seem appallingly inconsistent. "Catholics, Jews, Stiff-necked Quakers, and foolhardy believers in the Millenium" were to be barred from the colony. In 1664, Plockhoy's colony was completely destroyed by an English war expedition. What became of the Mennonite settlers is not known but Plockhoy spent his last days blind, and as a public charge, in the Germantown, Pennsylvania, colony.

William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, was born in London in 1644, a son of a British Admiral. He studied at Oxford and in 1666 joined the Society of Friends (Quakers). In 1668 he was imprisoned for spreading Quaker doctrines. For a claim he had against the British government he received in 1681 a grant of the region now Pennsylvania, meaning "Penn's Woods." He established friendly relations with the Indians\* and founded a colony with a large degree of religious liberty. All sects were allowed to settle in Pennsylvania and many oppressed and persecuted took refuge in this colony.

#### GERMANTOWN MENNONITE CHURCH



The first Mennonite church erected in America was built in 1708

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\* The Indians and Penn agreed that as long as the sun and moon would shine there would be peace between the descendants of Penn and the Indians.

In 1682, Jacob Tellner, a Mennonite merchant of Amsterdam, together with five families of Mennonites and Quakers from Krehfeld, Germany, purchased 18,000 acres in Pennsylvania. In 1683, thirteen Krehfeld families arrived on the ship **Concord** and under the leadership of Pastorious, a Pietist, founded Germantown—the first permanent colony in America. Other Mennonites came from Switzerland, France, and Germany to settle in Pennsylvania and the entire number has been estimated at twenty-five hundred. Later more settlements were established in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Ohio, New York, Indiana, Illinois, and other states west of the Mississippi. Between 1800 and 1860 new groups of Swiss, Hessian, Bavarian, and Amish Mennonites continued to migrate to America.

## 2. From Pennsylvania to Canada—1786

Beginning with 1786 several Mennonite colonies were established across the Great Lakes in Ontario. The migrations along the river valleys to the north were induced for several reasons: (1) In Pennsylvania land prices had risen extraordinarily and many were pressed to seek new homes. (2) Land was cheap and fertile in Ontario and river valleys and water ways offered a comparatively safe and cheap means of transportation to new settlements. (3) The Mennonites took no part in the 1776 American Revolution and sometimes were accused of being sympathetic to the British cause. (4) The movement was prompted by some degree of distrust in the new government. (5) The Canadian government offered military exemptions to Quakers and churches of similar beliefs. Consequently, in 1786, five families from Bucks county, Pennsylvania, settled about twenty miles west of Niagara. Soon others followed.

About at the same time a second much larger settlement was founded in Waterloo county, some sixty miles northwest of the lower colony. This country was at that time a "howling wilderness" and the first two Mennonite settlers, Joseph Schoerg and Samuel Betzner, are said to have been the first white settlers in the county. With Hans Eby as a leader, a group of Lancaster Mennonites, bought sixty thousand acres here and a few years later another tract of forty-five thousand acres. The land was paid for in gold and silver coin, safely carried by wagon in barrels all the way from Pennsylvania. During the following decades many other Mennonites joined the settlement. The village was first called **Ebyton**, then in 1827 Eby wished the name to be changed to **Berlin** and during the first World War it was once more changed, to **Kitchener**.

In 1803, Henry Wideman, a Mennonite preacher from Pennsylvania started another settlement near Markham, some twenty miles north of what is now Toronto. Beginning with 1824 several hundred Amish immigrants from Europe joined the Waterloo settlements. A total of about two thousand Mennonites migrated from Pennsylvania to Ontario between 1786 and 1825. The settlers

endured many hardships but prospered and in 1813 the first Mennonite church in Canada, the Eby church was built. Soon many other congregations were organized. When the Russian Mennonites arrived in 1874, the Ontario Mennonites were able and willing to lend no little assistance.

### 3. A Strange Migration to the "East"—1880

When the great exodus to America took place there were several sensitive groups in Russia who felt called to migrate east instead of west. Several Mennonite leaders leaned strongly toward prophetic and Millennialistic teachings. The writings of Jung-Stilling, a Pietist, had gained influence and for a time men like Eduard Wuest and Bernhard Harder were interested in doctrines that speculated on "time and place" of the Lord's Coming. At the Saratov settlements Claas Epp undertook to publish his own interpretations of Daniel and Revelation. At the Volga, Martin Claassen and at the Molotschna, Abraham Peters felt that the place of escape from the impending anti-Christian period would be found in central Asia. Alternative military service was to these groups a compromise with the "beast" and the "west" was to them a symbol of ungodliness. They sincerely believed that under the wings of the great eagle (Russia) the fleeing "ten wise virgins" would be saved from the terrible tribulation that soon would come. The place of refuge from where the faithful would soon be gathered would be near the Aral Sea in Asia.

On July 3, 1880, the first wagon train of ten families and forty horses left from Saratov on this visionary expedition—soon to be followed by thirteen more families. About at the same time a group of fifty-six families set out from the Molotschna, led by Abraham Peters. They endured distressing hardships on the way—many children and adults died of fever and epidemics. In September 1880 a fourth wagon train, consisting of twenty-five families on seventy wagons, led by Claas Epp, set out on the journey "east."

The following spring about one hundred families, led by Peters, finally reached a tract of rather poor land which was to be their home until the "Rapture." The region was one hundred and fifty miles northeast of the city of Tashkent. Even here they were forced to do forestry service but were permitted to stay with their families and plant trees close to the villages. They established five villages. About one half of the settlers belonged to the Mennonite church and half to the Mennonite Brethren group. The settlement suffered disappointments, dissensions, and poverty and eventually many of the settlement found their way to America.

In the meantime, Claas Epp's group, after braving blizzards and battling sicknesses for four months, reached Turkestan. Here they were driven back and forth across the border several times until in 1882 they were finally permitted to locate near the city of Khiva. In spite of all hardships, disappointments, and obstacles,



Claas Epp remained undaunted in his extreme views—in fact, increasing in fanaticism daily. He claimed that he would soon meet Elijah in the sky and that he would be bodily transported to heaven. Dressed in an ascension robe, Epp took his stand behind an altar and his adherents thought that he had actually disappeared but soon he was on earth again. He now set the date of Christ's appearance for March 6, 1889. This day, he explained, had been revealed to him by the dial of a clock whose hands had pointed to 8 and 9 and stopped. When the day came and passed he told his followers that the clock unfortunately had leaned and thus given the wrong number. When straightened the hands had pointed to 9 and 1—hence the correct day would be March 6, 1891. His fanaticism came to a climax when he claimed equality with Christ. He now insisted on the formula: Father, Sons, and Holy Ghost. His deluded followers finally realized that this was akin to blasphemy and he was cast out of their fellowship. Disillusioned and sobered, most of them realized that they had been in great error. In 1899 a visitor to the Khiva colony found that its population numbered thirty-seven families—one hundred and forty persons living in small adobe shanties—one hundred and thirty-two lay buried in the nearby cemetery. From here, too, a number emigrated to America.

This strange episode stands alone in Mennonite history. The trek to Asia was economically a terrible fiasco and it was basically unscriptural. Although marked by sincerity and good intentions they overlooked Christ's admonition: "if they say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth," and; "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." This visionary company began their trek by chanting:

Traveling to the promised land,  
Through the desert heat and sand,  
Hold Me Father, by Thy hand,  
Lead me on, only on.

Soon we'll reach that promised land,  
Where with Christ we shall ascend;  
Come and join this happy band,  
Lead us on, only on.

P. M. Friesen reports that in 1910 the Tashkent settlement still consisted of about two hundred families. Greatly sobered and freed from their earthly "haven of security" ideas the settlers, after years of trials and tribulations had become stable groups with organized churches. C. Henry Smith states that before World War I, near the city of Khiva, a small flock of about twenty-five Mennonite families were huddled together on a small land complex of fifteen acres. The settlers were engaged in small industries, a little gardening, and employment in the nearby city. Claas Epp had died in 1913. This strange trek to Asia began with joy and high hopes and ended in delusions and bitter tears.

#### 4. Migrations From Canada to Mexico—1922

In the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Provinces laws were passed in 1918 forbidding the use of the German language in either private or public schools. For some Mennonite settlers, who, for fifty years had known no other tongue in their schools and churches, these strict laws spread great consternation. They waited, appealed, and paid fines but when the regulations were not repealed the "Old Colonists" sent deputies to South America and to Mexico to explore settlement possibilities.

In Mexico they were promised religious liberty and complete control of their schools, so they decided to move. Their prosperous farms were sold at great sacrifices and in 1922, five thousand Old Colonists, assisted by John F. D. Wiebe\* as immigration agent, left for Mexico. Two large colonies were established: One about fifty miles west of the city of Chihuahua; the other farther inland near the city of Durango. Later a group of "Sommerfelders" also emigrated to Mexico. The colonists settled in villages, the largest group not far from Cuauhtemoc in the state of Chihuahua. Patiently by thrift and ingenious farming they have succeeded in transforming a desolate country into more than forty well-established villages.

Some years later a group of about sixty-five members of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonites (Holdeman) settled in the Cuauhtemoc region and another small group of settlers consisted of World War I refugees from Russia.

When World War II ended, the idea of moving to a freer country than Canada gained ground among the Kleine Gemeinde members in that land. Their sons had been required to do Alternative Service and they feared to become more and more involved in militaristic trends. Early in 1948 a 52,000 acre tract was purchased at Los Jagueyes, Mexico. Two thirds of the land was taken by the Kleine Gemeinde and one third by the Old Colony group. About one hundred families, or fifteen per cent of the whole Kleine Gemeinde population from Canada migrated to Mexico.

#### 5. Migrations to Paraguay, South America

##### A. From Canada to the Menno Colony—1926

Not all the conservative Mennonites in Canada, unwilling to send their children to English schools, migrated to Mexico. In November 1926 a movement of Sommerfelders from Manitoba and Saskatchewan began to migrate to the Chaco in Paraguay. This historic pilgrimage of 281 families of 1,778 persons met upon arrival in Paraguay with nearly insurmountable difficulties — in fact 355 "would be" settlers became discouraged and returned to Canada, most of them never having entered the Chaco. (The Chaco is a vast plain a little larger than the state of Nevada.)

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\* John F. D. Wiebe was a son of the founder of Gnadenau, Kansas. He had moved to Saskatchewan and had served as mayor of Herbert. One of his sons, Jacob A. Wiebe, a grandson of the 1874 Elder Jacob A. Wiebe, has made his permanent home at Cuauhtemoc, Mexico.

When the group arrived at Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, they were greeted with a reception by the President. After a 12,000 mile journey the weary pilgrims finally reached Puerto Casado, the last river boat station. When they landed they found that the land they bought farther inland was not even surveyed.



Mennonite settlements in Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay

They were compelled to wait sixteen months before the surveying was completed. They made provisional camps and waited. They had arrived in December, 1926 and in the middle of 1927 a typhoid epidemic broke out and by the end of the year one hundred and forty-seven had died. Before they moved to their land almost two hundred homeless pilgrims had been buried. In April, 1928, the first settlers reached their land and the **Menno Colony**, was established. The colonizers were divided into fourteen villages. Many of the crops they had planned to grow did not thrive in the tropical climate and the settlers were forced to make terrific ad-



justments. The soil, the seasons, the rainfall, the farming methods and the climate were all vastly different from their former Canadian home.

Menno is the oldest and also the largest colony in Paraguay. It has grown rapidly and the number of villages has increased to more than fifty. Their crops are cotton, kaffir, peanuts, corn, mandioca, sweet potatoes, sugar cane, oranges, lemons, grapefruit, tangerines and bananas. Although their noon-day sun is towards the north instead of the south and many things are vastly different than at their former home, they have by this time become quite well adjusted. The "Menno-Blatt" reports that in January, 1957, the population of the Menno colony was 4,280 residents.

### B. The Fernheim (Distant Home) Colony—1930

The doors to Canada and the United States had closed to Mennonites fleeing from Bolshevik Russia. Consequently new avenues of escape had to be found. The settlers of **Fernheim**, the second oldest Mennonite colony in Paraguay, were refugees from Russia. Most of them left Russia in 1929 with official permission but later contingents left Russia by flight. These colonists were guaranteed absolute religious freedom, exemption from military service, freedom to operate their own schools and besides all were permitted to enter: old and young; ill and crippled without examination.

Since these refugees had become destitute, the Mennonite Central Committee raised almost \$100,000 for the purpose of moving and resettling them. On April 26, 1930, the first immigrants reached their destination. Three weeks later the land was surveyed and 2,001 persons could move onto their land and found the Fernheim colony. These immigrants came from Russia by way of Germany. In 1931 a small group of fifty Polish Mennonites who had first gone to Brazil, joined the Fernheim colony in the Chaco.

In 1932 another group of refugees came to Fernheim. These had made their exodus from Russia by flight by way of China. They were people who had moved to Siberia in 1927, hoping to gain more religious freedom. Soon they realized that their plight had not lessened and another strange epic was written into the annals of a wandering people. In 1931, in bitter midwinter, two entire villages executed a daring flight across the frozen **Amur** river. They made their escape with sixty sleds, while the Russian police was guarding every foot of the Russian-Chinese border. Careful secret planning had been done for many months. Each family had provided itself with a team of horses, a sled, food, and clothing. They fled in the middle of the night, eluding the Russian watch by leaving their lamps lit in the vacated homes so that their escape would not be immediately detected. When they reached the other side of the river, one family found that one of their children had suffocated under the heavy blankets. By the end of winter, five hundred and fifty refugees had reached Harbin, China. Some two hundred of these were permitted to enter the United States, and

three hundred and sixty-seven reached the Fernheim colony on April 12, 1932. Here they settled in four villages, usually still referred to as the "Harbin Corner."

The varied and startling experiences of the Fernheim colonists; their epic journeys, their penniless arrival, their pioneer struggles at a distance of seventy miles from the nearest railway, and their battle with typhoid epidemics—all testify of the valor of these people. Fernheim at the end of 1950 consisted of twenty-one villages with 2,339 people. In the center of the colony the settlers have laid out the exclusive Mennonite town, Philadelphia, with schools, churches, shops, and a hospital. The town has more than two hundred families.



Courtesy A. E. Janzen

Colony Hall, Philadelphia, Fernheim

### C. The Friesland Colony—1937

In 1937 a group of 748 individuals withdrew from the Fernheim colony and started the **Friesland** colony, forty miles east of Rosario. The cooperative system, practiced in Fernheim, did not appeal to this group. They believed that a location closer to markets would be more suitable. This colony bought 16,795 acres—some plowland, some pasture, some woodland, and some swampland. The soil is productive and climate favorable but the basic problem is finding a market for the goods produced. In 1950 Friesland consisted of 189 families living in nine villages with a total population of 986. The villages are placed at the edge of the woods. The timber land is higher and more fertile and will sustain domestic fruit trees such as grapefruit, orange, lemon, and shade trees, and flowers and vegetables. They raise poultry and livestock and their chief crops are cotton and kaffir.



Courtesy A. E. Janzen

Mennonites picking cotton at Friesland

#### D. Migrations to the Volendam and Neuland Colonies—1947

Many Mennonites left Russia and finally came to Paraguay but other less fortunate ones had to stay behind in Russia. During World War II, thousands of Mennonites in Russia were evacuated by the Soviet government and transplanted to other regions. When in the fall of 1943 the German army retreated, 35,000 Mennonites were in the population preceding the retreating army. At the close of the war these Mennonites found themselves as displaced persons in the British, American, French, and Russian zones of occupation in Germany. The largest number, perhaps as many as 25,000, were again sent back to Russia, from which they had fled. However, 1,125 refugees were rescued from Berlin and in Bremerhaven another 1,200 Mennonite refugees had gathered. On February 1, 1947, the Dutch steamer **Volendam**, with 2,305 refugees from Berlin and Bremerhaven, under the leadership of Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, left Europe bound for Paraguay. They landed at Buenos Aires and after some delay in this city they proceeded to their destination. About half of the refugees settled in a new colony which they named **Volendam**. It lies west of the Friesland colony in a region bordering the Paraguay River.

The other half of the Volendam contingent, 870 persons, established a new colony in the Chaco located south of the Fernheim colony. They called this new settlement **Neuland** (New land.) Some of the refugee group joined relatives in older colonies and some went to the city of Asuncion. About one hundred and sixty had deserted the group in Argentina and had preferred to stay there. The total cost of moving the contingent was \$500,000. In March, 1947 the steamer **Stuart Heinzelman** arrived with 860



refugees and of this group 800 settled in Neuland and most of the others in Volendam. In July 1948, the **Charlton Monarch** brought a third contingent of refugees. Of these 667 went to Neuland and 91 to Volendam. In November, 1948 the Volendam arrived again in South America with the fourth refugee contingent of whom 694 went to Volendam and 132 to the Neuland colony.

### In the Neuland Village



Courtesy Mennonite Life

The first needs of immigrants—A shelter and a well

A great deal of Christian neighborliness was extended by the older colonists towards the destitute new arrivals. In Fernheim it had been agreed that each family would shelter and board free of charge a refugee family until it could occupy its own home. Also, since about forty percent of the Neuland families were husbandless, the Fernheim families had agreed that each six families would construct a dwelling for a widow and her family in Neuland. Oxen and farm implements were to be loaned to the newcomers. In addition the Mennonite Central Committee helped the Volendam and Neuland settlers financially and in other ways. According to **Pilgrims in Paraguay** the total Mennonite Central Committee Paraguayan expenditures, 1928 to 1951, amount to almost two million dollars. In 1950 Neuland had twenty-five villages with a population of 2,497 persons and the Volendam colony had fifteen villages with a population of 1,820 persons. The economic progress of the colonies has been slow and many have migrated to Canada. In 1959 the population of Volendam had dropped to 1,200.

### E. Migrations from Canada to East Paraguay—1948

In July, 1948, the Dutch liner **Volendam** brought a cargo of 1,700 Sommerfelder and Bergthal Mennonites from Canada to East Paraguay. These settlers made the move because they feared continued pressure towards secularization in Canada. The group of farmers embarked with fifty-five freight carloads of baggage. Besides other implements they brought with them thirteen tractors for general farm work and a large bulldozer to build roads and to clear land.

They settled in two colonies: **Sommerfeld**, located eighty-seven miles east of the last railway station, Villarica, and **Bergthal**, twenty-five miles east of Sommerfeld. Soon the settlers encountered bitter disappointments. They did not find the open land they had expected. Within about a year more than six hundred of them returned to Canada. Some discouraging factors were: They had to cut their own road through the woods and then pay toll for using it; the land was difficult to clear, much of their cattle died, and they had to fight insects constantly. The land when once cleared, however, proved productive and the colonists slowly adjusted themselves, determined to maintain their faith and way of life. The colonies had the advantage that the region abounds in sweet water, green pastures, and plenty of timber for building. The colonies are in need of better transportation facilities and better markets, but their future looks promising.

### 6. Migrations to Brazil, South America—1930

About 2,500 Mennonites have migrated to Brazil. They came in 1930 and later—some from Harbin, China, some from Germany and others from scattered places. The first settlers came aided by Holland Mennonites. Colonizers in Brazil are welcome but no military exemptions are offered, yet many Mennonite refugees preferred Brazil to Paraguay.

The first Mennonites settled at the **Krauel** river (Old Witmarsum) and seven hundred feet higher, on the Stolz Plateau the **Anhagen** village was founded. The first settlement numbered seven hundred persons and the second five hundred. Both settlements have been abandoned for more favorable regions in Brazil.

In 1937 some of the settlers began to move to the outskirts of the growing city of Curitiba and within a decade more than two hundred families had located there. They built up fine Holstein dairy herds and are said to supply more than seventy-five per cent of all the milk for Curitiba, a city of 200,000 inhabitants. Many of the young people are employed in the city and economically the Curitiba settlers are doing well but they have difficulty retaining their identity.

In 1950, forty-two families from the Krauel settlement moved to a new location, twenty-five miles southeast of Bage, a city of 60,000. Within a year this colony increased to seventy-seven families. The land was purchased with the help of the Men-



### Mennonites Delivering Milk in Curitiba



nonite Brethren churches in North America. In 1951 the colony consisted of two villages and 365 people. It is unique in successfully producing wheat as their chief crop. Their wheat acreage had increased to 1,791 acres, but they have marketing difficulties.

### Bage, Brazil Mennonite Brethren Church



Courtesy M. B. Publishing House

At the time of the South American Mennonite Brethren Conference, January 29, 1956



Most of the remaining settlers of the Krauel settlement have moved to the **New Witmarsum** colony, about forty-five miles from Curitiba. Here about 20,000 acres were purchased with the help of Kansas General Conference Mennonite churches. The purchase included substantial frame buildings. The colony is a cooperative venture with headquarters for a store, a school, and a hospital. Four villages were laid out near a well improved highway and the region offers good opportunities for dairying and diversified farming. In June, 1954, the last payment was made on the land. Seventy-four families, consisting of 438 persons, had moved to New Witmarsum. This colony has made good progress and it is hoped that this settlement as well as other colonies in Brazil will develop into stable communities of a high religious and economic level. The relocation and expansion of the colonies—although difficult at first, has created new interests and new incentives.

### Curitiba, Brazil Mennonite Church



Church at right, high school, center, social hall at left. The buildings are used jointly by the General Conference Mennonite members and the Mennonite Brethren members.

## 7. Migrations to Uruguay, South America—1948

It is strange that until 1948 Uruguay had not been considered as a suitable place for Mennonite settlements. Especially since this country offers advantages that would appeal to Mennonite faith and traditions. The Uruguayan constitution guarantees religious freedom with legal provisions for military exemptions for those who cannot partake in war. There is no established State Church in Uruguay. It has a pleasant climate and its chief crop is wheat. Many other grains, fruit, and livestock are produced.

In 1948, six hundred and ninety displaced refugees from Danzig, Germany and sixty from Poland, founded the first Mennonite settlement in Uruguay. Aided by the Mennonite Central Committee the colonists bought a 2,900 acre ranch known as **El Ombu**, located about one hundred and eighty miles inland from Montevideo. About half of the immigrants settled on this land and the

rest took employment in Montevideo, or scattered on small farms near the city. In October, 1951 a second contingent arrived from Danzig, numbering 431 refugees. Another tract of 4,500 acres was purchased and divided into one hundred and thirty-nine homesteads. Thirty-nine of these farms were taken by immigrants of the first contingent and one hundred by those that came in the second group. The El Ombu land had been settled in seventy-



An El Ombu Mennonite Pioneer Home.

five homesteads. The total Mennonite population in Uruguay had now reached about 1,200 persons. Later small groups and isolated families have joined the settlements.

It appears to be relatively easy to get a start in Uruguay. Religiously the immigrants need more stability but Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite churches have been organized. Sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee an inter-Mennonite seminary has been established at Montevideo which draws students from all South American colonies. Although Uruguay is one of the smallest of the South American countries, with an area ten thousand square miles less than that of Kansas, yet, it is one of the most progressive countries in South America.

### 8. Migrations to Argentina—1948

Argentina is the second largest country in South America with an area four times that of Texas. Buenos Aires, its capital, is the largest city in Latin America. The Catholic church is state supported and its President must be Roman Catholic and an Argentinian by birth. All creeds are to be tolerated but service in the army is compulsory. In the center of Argentina the climate is temperate; the northern tip is hot, and the southern extremity is very cold. Wheat, grains, fruit, alfalfa, and cotton are cultivated.

Only a small number of Mennonites have migrated to Argentina—probably about five hundred. Some have drifted there as isolated families from Paraguay, but the largest group came with the first Volendam contingent. While the group was delayed

in Buenos Aires, one hundred and sixty-two refugees deserted the Paraguay-bound group. They revolted from staying in the camps and set out to live their own lives in Argentina, possibly encouraged by Argentine residents. Those who broke away had been uncooperative and indifferent to active Christianity. Culturally and traditionally they maintain that they are Mennonites. Economically the immigrants are getting along well. Many work at skilled trades in factories and construction jobs or they have small businesses of their own. Few settlers would want to leave. The Mennonite Central Committee has established a Center in Buenos Aires for the purpose of assisting the settlers spiritually and socially.

### 9. Migration to British Honduras, Central America—1958

British Honduras is a small country in Central America, belonging to Great Britain. It has an area of almost 9,000 square miles. Among its chief products are fruit, mahogany, coffee, sugar, rubber, and livestock. Belize, with a population of about 22,000, is its capital and chief market. Its population consists principally of Negroes and Indians and some white residents — a total population of 56,000. It has a healthful favorable climate—its temperature ranging between 50 and 98 degrees.

In April, 1958, the first contingent of twenty families, led by Jacob Dyck and Peter Wiebe, left Cuauhtemoc, Mexico to migrate to British Honduras. It is not yet known how many more will follow but 114,000 acres of land have been purchased in British Honduras by Old Colonists for future settlements. The contingent left for their new home by large busses but part of the trip will be made by boat. This is the first settlement of Mennonites in Central America.

### 10. A Forced Exile to the North—1943

Before the Russian Revolution of 1917 the Mennonites of South Russia had reached a high state of culture and affluency. By 1910 thirty-six daughter colonies had been established, embracing 365 villages, with a population of over 100,000 and a land ownership of 1,500,000 desjatinen or 3,750,000 acres. The villages consisted of model farms, prosperous industries, factories, schools, hospitals and churches.

The Revolution was followed by the terrible famine of 1921 to 1923. These years with the preceding revolution marked a period of decline and ruin for Russian Mennonites. This period was followed by a brief interval of attempted agricultural reconstruction but in 1928 to 1933 the farmers were liquidated and farming changed to agrarian collectivization. A program of terror was directed against capitalist influence, private ownership, and Christianity. Many wealthy Mennonite farmers who had survived the revolution, civil war, and famine, were now arrested, deported, their families exiled, and their property expropriated. The Mennonites were classified as **Kulaks** to be liquidated. Their efforts to



preserve their heritage, own schools, and to cultivate their church life, were equally considered illegal. Church conferences were no longer permitted.

Many fled to Moscow and pled for permission to emigrate and some six thousand were permitted to leave Russia but thousands were placed on freight trains and forcibly returned to their homes. One report says: "The years 1929 to 1932 saw hundreds of trains of liquidated Kulaks from every province being taken to the forests of the North and Siberia. Many Mennonite families from all our settlements were found on these trains." During 1936 to 1938 more waves of frightful **purges** were initiated and again the Mennonite villages suffered most severely. Those that were deported to the North considered themselves fortunate to escape imprisonment and death.

During World War II, beginning with 1941, the once prosperous Chortitza and Molotschna villages received their death blow. As the German army approached, the entire population of Germans from the Volga region was deported beyond the **Urals**. Some of these were Mennonites. Those remaining in the area occupied by the German army, accompanied the German army in

### War and Ruin in Chortitza

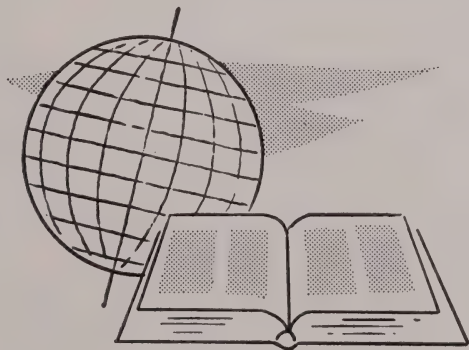


Courtesy Mennonite Life

Main Street of Chortitza in 1943. The German army is retreating and the refugees moving westward. The first Mennonite settlers came to Chortitza in 1879 and the last left in 1943—one hundred and fifty-three years later.

their retreat. A long procession of Mennonites wandered back to Germany from where they had come a century and a half before. Of these some 12,000 remained stranded in Germany as displaced persons but some 25,000 were forcibly repatriated by the Russian government and many were sent to Siberia. The Chortitza and Molotschna colonies ceased to exist. The individual farms had been discontinued, the farm buildings dismantled, and instead large collective farms instituted. The well-built schools and modern hospitals were no more and the large churches had been destroyed or they were used for commercial purposes; as stores, sheep stables, or chicken houses. The Gnadenfeld Mennonite church, one of the finest church buildings in the colonies, was closed in 1933 and used as a granary and later as a motion picture theater. The Gnadenfeld village was destroyed by fire in 1943. The Halbstadt Mennonite church had its last service January 1, 1931. The church and cemetery were demolished in 1938. The large Tiege Mennonite Brethren church was closed and used as an army store. A visitor to the Orloff village found that the Orloff cemetery had been completely razed. The tombstones of Cornies, Reimer, Wiebe, Warkentin, Goertz, Janzen and many many more had been used for street pavement.

It is much too early to say that the Mennonite influence in Russia has ended. In the far North of this vast empire, Mennonite groups have survived deportations and persecutions and practice a virile Christianity. The younger generations speak Russian but many of the surviving relatives have been reunited and the Mennonite people are moving toward centers where they can fellowship with each other. In the Divine providence of God the dispersal of the Russian Mennonites may yet be fruitful.



## EPILOGUE

### The Unfinished Trek

*For he looked for a city which hath foundations*

Migrations for "conscience sake" may not have ended. Since the Anabaptist time, scarcely a decade has gone by without some group changing from one country to another. Small and large groups have wandered from place to place in quest of religious freedom and conscience toleration. Certainly no cost is too dear and no pilgrimage too far to maintain eternal values.

In our kaleidoscopic glimpses of the wanderings of the Mennonite people we have seen marshes, plains, and desolate wildernesses come to verdant life. Uninhabited regions have blossomed into waving grain fields and into fruitful orchards. Barren prairies have become dotted with homes, churches, schools, hospitals, and colleges. Determination, energy, patience, and **faith** have transformed swampy lowlands, windswept steppes, wild prairies, and the "Green Hell" of the Paraguayan Chaco into productive regions. With the blessings of God, nature and environment have bowed to the will of men.

Yet, in the panorama of wanderings there have also appeared examples of bitter disappointments and graves strewn along the way. Examples of heartaches, tragic mistakes, and failures—many unavoidable but others unnecessary. Some a result of rashness and some of blunderings and stupidity. Men's fallibility has appeared in his inability to discern true values, in his hasty judgments, and ill-advised choices.

There have been those who under the stress of many years of adversities, wanderings, refugee lives, disillusionments, and disrupted family ties, have become embittered and indifferent to eternal values. Both, great wealth and abject poverty, can prove extremely disintegrating and lives become warped and purposeless. Happy is he who in all life's situations finds that serene balance and anchor that weathers the storm.

Two extremes have constantly troubled Mennonite people. Many have harmed themselves and hindered progress by blindly clinging to the past. Things of minor importance have become fetishes hindering social, cultural, and spiritual growth. A stubborn holding on to insignificant details and the worshipping of man-made dictums have no value and eventually lead to soul starvation and to moral decay. The Past is to throw light on the Present and on the Future—to hold the key to unlock doors to new revelations, but the Past is not to exert a paralyzing influence. There is no virtue in blindly closing ones eyes to new knowledge. Customs, languages and traditions are important, but even these must remain subordinate to higher values and to a constant search for the "better" way. Always there will remain New Frontiers to be crossed.



At times there has appeared the other extreme; a hasty and tragic surrender of priceless heritages. In the urge for progress and spectacular achievements there have been those who foolishly cast aside their birthrights for messes of pottage. They have readily accepted the **new** unchallenged and have been led astray by false goals, false values, and false gods. Rather than to become wanderers they have abandoned eternal values.

Other enemies that have sapped the vitality of these home seekers have been a lack of cooperation, coherence, and loyalty. Communities, schools, and churches have suffered because they found it difficult to work together. Shortsightedness, misunderstandings, nonessentials, and jealousies have undermined concerted action. The loss of trained men and women in Mennonite circles has been deplorable. If the Mennonite groups could have kept their college and university trained men, their schools would be staffed with more highly trained teachers and their churches with more well prepared leaders.

To guard their **identity** these people have migrated from country to country. Paradoxically, once we try to define this "identity" it becomes a rather elusive concept. With some it is **birth**, with some it is **customs**, and with some it is a **name** or a **tradition**. Basically, we believe, it is neither. Stripped of its name, customs and traditions—what has eternal value is a **faith**. **A faith in an eternal God; a faith in the Redeemer; a faith in the eternal Word; and a faith that love and not force is the answer to the ills of the world.**

Was it in vain to attempt to live this faith? Is it an idle dream to look forward to a day when it will receive the understanding and loyalty it deserves? When, purged from bigotry and nonessentials, divisions and dissensions, it marches forward to conquer by love, a sin-steeped and blood-drenched world? This, is the call of faith.

For more than four centuries the immigrants and their forebears have at least attempted to witness to this faith. In doing so they were led from land to land. One generation after another worked, planned, wept, and hoped. Each generation made its contribution of which its descendants can justly be proud. Their **faith** triumphed in spite of persecutions, wanderings, misunderstandings, and pioneer hardships—because it was founded on the **Rock**.

But what if the immigrants and their forebears had not been obedient to the call of faith? What if their beliefs and convictions had not been dearer to them than their homes and possessions? The answer is obvious: The candlestick given to them as a people would long ago have been removed and their descendants would not now be the recipients of innumerable blessings.

This has been a survey of Mennonite migrations. When in 1873 a delegation was sent to St. Petersburg, then the capital of Russia, they were received by the Czar. History reports that when these unassuming men pled their cause, Czar Alexander II wept. To keep the Mennonites from migrating **en masse** the Russian

government proposed that in lieu of military service they were to serve three years in government forestry. This compromise proposal brought about heated discussions. Those who emigrated were blamed for rashness and unreasonableness. The result was that only one-third or 15,000 left for America. By far the larger part remained in Russia but had they all left, the Russian Mennonites would have escaped the horrible revolutions, famines, liquidations, banishments, and violent deaths.

And what about the 15,000 who migrated? Are they still the sturdy, honest, thrifty, and Godfearing people or are they fast becoming a people of bad husbandry, extravagant habits, and spiritual indifference? It is not enough to build on a good heritage and to enjoy special benefits. It will take constant and eternal vigilance to preserve the truths and freedoms that have been gained. Chancellor Lindley, of the University of Kansas said: "Unless the Mennonites are different from others, what is true of others will be true of them: the first generation makes the sacrifices, the second enjoys the benefits, the third lets them slip away." Could it be that the splendors of a priceless heritage are fast fading away? And if they vanish from one group will there be others that rise to the challenge? A grave thought is expressed by Silas Marner, "When a man turns a blessing from his door it falls to them as take it in." Eternal vigilance is the challenge to this and to future generations. But "they that say such things declare plainly that **they seek a country.**"

Away from the mire, and away from the clay,  
God leads His dear children along;  
Away up in glory, eternity's day,  
God leads His dear children along.

—C. A. Young.

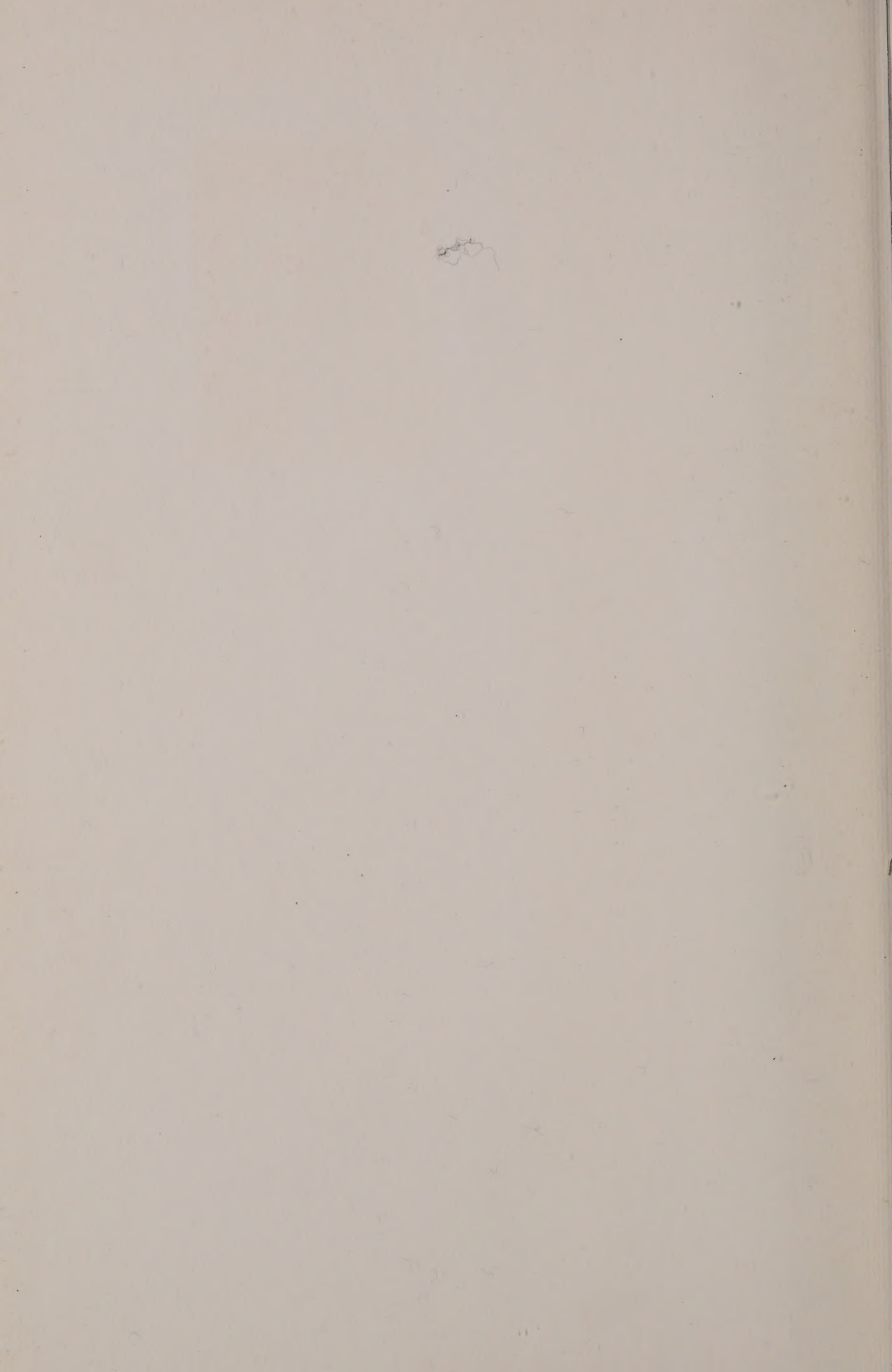




Guller p. 42, 53, 94,

Leontonia p. 84, 85







## They Seek a Country



The Author was the youngest son of an immigrant to Kansas. He grew up on a farm ten miles west of the now extinct Gnadenu and Hoffnungsthal villages.

After finishing the country school he attended the Kansas Agricultural College at Manhattan and Tabor College at Hillsboro (Kansas). In 1927 he received the Master of Arts degree from the University of Kansas. He has done graduate work at the University of Colorado and the University of Chicago.

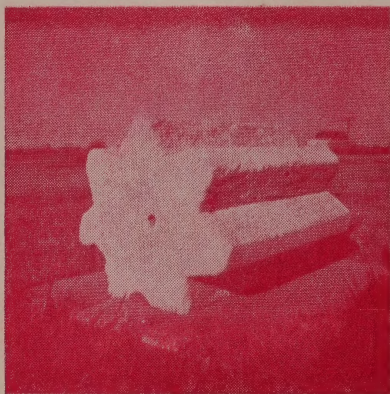
The author has taught in secondary schools and in college and has served as pastor of several churches in Kansas and on the West Coast. Early in his career he developed an interest in the migrations of his ancestors and in the sociological aspects of the wanderings of these people. For ten years he served as a member of the Mennonite Central Committee. His studies, work, and interests have taken him to different states, British Columbia, Mexico, and Europe. He now resides at Fresno, California.

THEY SEEK A COUNTRY is a Historical and Sociological report of immigrants who wandered from country to country in quest of religious freedom.

For conscience sake these pioneers came to America and opened new frontiers. When in need of a home, America magnanimously welcomed these strangers and gave them homes and liberty. For this they were deeply grateful.

The story of their wanderings from place to place, their background, their beliefs, their customs, their settlements, and their expansion as well as their contributions is graphically told in

## THEY SEEK A COUNTRY



As a result of a happy incident rather than a planned procedure, these **home seekers** brought with them the **hard** winter wheat which revolutionized the flour industry and proved to be of monumental economic importance.

Courtesy, Kansas State Board of Agriculture

